

The First Time

ChorusGirl

Star Wars

Complete



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Summary

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Description:

Anakin and Padme want to live in marital bliss. Trouble is, they haven't even had their first wedding night. If only, the Order would leave him with his new wife long enough to share a night. Story might get a little steamy!

1. Wedding Bliss?

Title: The First Time

Author: ChorusGirl/HeKilledYounglings

Please feel free to review. TO SEE THE “NAUGHTY” version of this story Google, .com

A secret wedding.

The newlyweds? A powerful young queen from Naboo and a young Jedi Padawan learner.

She wore a white lace covering over her head and a white dress. Her new husband wore black and dark brown. His shiny new prosthetic arm gleamed in the sunlight. He caressed her face.

A cleric on Naboo performed the secret wedding.

He kissed his wife. Thinking, how he desperate he was to carry her off to their suite. A feeling that could only be described as desire intermingled with nervous excitement. When the ceremony was over the cleric bade them goodbye, having sensed the broom's eagerness to be alone with his wife.

“Shoo!” Anakin said, without looking over his shoulders at the two droids that accompanied them. His eyes were locked on her face.

He was leering again and Padme didn't like it. He had the look of someone who could — if possible, devour her whole... like a jelly filled bread bun. Yes, that awful leering reminded her of when he was first assigned by the chancellor to protect her. That day, she was busy packing her luggage — and he, was busy complaining about his Master Obi Wan Kenobi.

She called him Ani.

He announced he wasn't Little Ani anymore... but a man. He stood before her... tall and ever present... peering down at her from crystal clear blue eyes. At that moment, the attraction between them was palatable. Like waves of energy volleying back and forth between them. He was seducing her. But Padme couldn't allow it. She was his superior and he was studying to become a Jedi Knight. It was dangerous.

“Don't look at me like that!” she snapped.

She was angry. Angry at herself because she knew, deep within her heart that she was already trapped... locked under his spell, slipping over an event horizon like a wave of light and crushed to singularity only days later after finally admitting that she loved him too. As hard as she tried not to she did. Then again, she always loved him. But this time, she loved him differently than when she cared for him those ten years ago when he was just a little boy and she, a very young lady.

Strangely it felt as though the tables had turned and he felt older than her and not the other way around.

The two droids, Threepio and Artoo Detoo stood beside them on the veranda, the sun gleaming against Threepios platinum colored plates. Slowly, the newlyweds slipped inside, leaving their droid companions behind and walked to the honeymoon suite.

There, Anakin shed his cloak, leaving it on the floor close to where they stood. Padme trembled... just a little. It was probably the beat of her heart thumping wildly in her chest.

Anakin held his thumb beneath her chin, tilting her face upward.

"I'm scared too," he whispered.

He might have sensed her feelings. It was impossible to hide anything from *him*.

Anakin leaned in, his hand still holding her face. But Padme's arm shot out and grabbed the flesh wrist on his left hand. It seemed as though she were pushing him away. The truth was, she grabbed him, hoping to pull him closer. Anakin shivered from the touch. He slid behind her, bringing his lips to the nape of her neck, his hands reaching around to cup her breasts. She felt the hardness of his erection through the thin fabric of her gown. His hand slid the dress she wore up her legs.

Padme turned, to draw him into a passionate kiss, when suddenly, the comlink Anakin wore on his belt begin to buzz. He let out a frustrated growl as his hands dropped.

"I have to take this," he said, in answer to her unasked question.

Padme clung to the sleeve of his shirt, waiting tentatively for the session to continue.

"Yes, Master," he spoke into the comlink... "I'm wanted by the council?"

Padme released a panicked sigh.

"But—" he began to object. The warbling on the other end came through the line forcefully enough for Padme to hear.

Obi Wan Kenobi.

"Yes, Master..." Anakin finished.

He severed the connection.

"I'm wanted on Coruscant."

"But you're not well..." Padme said, touching his arm. "What could they want with you now?"

"My sword arm... I'm wanted for physical therapy. They want to know if my arm is good enough to..." he stopped, sensing her dread.

"To fight again?" Padme asked him sadly.

Anakin turned. "If we're going to be married..."

"We are married," Padme corrected.

“You’ll have to come to terms with my career. I’m a Jedi. Disputes happen.”

“If you fail the physical examination...”

“I won’t.”

“We can be together. We won’t be forced to live a lie. You could retire without shame. You fought honorably and was injured.”

“Retire?” he asked, as though she spoke complete and utter nonsense. “This is what I want to do Padme. Would you like if I asked you to leave the palace? To leave politics altogether?”

“I couldn’t, there’s too much at stake right now!”

“Then you understand my dilemma,” Anakin finished. “The Republic is in trouble.”

Padme drew close to her husband, resting her open palm on the side of his flustered face. He looked down, not looking at her now.

“I worry about you Anakin... that you’re doing too much. Maybe getting married was wrong... maybe this is a sign.”

His eyes rose to meet her face.

“Now that I have you,” he said, almost desperately... “I’m never letting go. I love you, Padme.”

“They’re taking you away from me on our wedding night.”

“Don’t worry my love,” he soothed.

He stalked past her and grabbed his dark brown cloak from the floor.

“I won’t be long.”

As Padme stared after him and the door closed, she let out a relieved sigh. Like a man on death row issued a reprieve. As much as she wanted her husband there with her on their wedding night, she was also very nervous. This was Ani. He was a man now, and not only a man, but her husband!

It finally hit her.

She sat on the edge of the bed and bit her fingers nervously.

2. Distractions

Anakin flew his ship to Coruscant. His heart thumped wildly with nervous anticipation. Twice now, he almost crashed his ship into an asteroid field.

He couldn't stop thinking about her. He didn't want to stop thinking about her. He dreamt of this moment in time for ten long years. How will it happen? When will it happen? He was only nine years old when they parted. Who knew the Sith, whoever they were, could *unintentionally* bring him so much happiness? The irony of which, who knew the Jedi could bring him so much misery? For once could they just leave him alone? Let him rest? Let him be with the wife he's not supposed to have in the first place?

And what was so wrong with having a wife? Married people have children. And children have the genes of their parents. So how then, wouldn't the Jedi benefit from reproducing? Their children would be as powerful as their parents. The Order would grow manifold. This could only be good for the galaxy.

But no... the Jedi were afraid of love. They were afraid of letting *him* love. If it weren't for the love he found with Padme, he might have never forgiven them for keeping him away from his mother... allowing her to die. And even now that forgiveness was questionable.

Anakin sighed as his ship passed through Coruscant's stratosphere, its speed declining as it neared the ground of a Temple landing base. He missed her so much. Wanted to kiss her so much, wanted to touch her...

He let the thought trail, to be heard only in the echoes of his heart. It was time to pretend again. To talk, be officious, act as though the woman of his dreams were not somewhere waiting for him. He wondered if he were the only one.

A short while later, Anakin entered the temple, hurrying to stand before the council, who were more than concerned about his injury and prosthetic arm. Not many Jedi wore prosthetics. In fact, it was known to diminish one's force abilities in the region of the particular implant.

"Come in, Young Skywalker..." Mace demanded.

Anakin walked in, hands folded behind his back, glove covering his injured arm.

"Yes, Master."

"Strong the force still is, with our Padawan," Yoda commented with some relief.

Mace let his eyes roam over the young man. "Well... he is the chosen one," Mace answered.

"How are you Anakin?" Obi Wan Gently prodded.

"Fine, things considered. I'm adjusting to my new limb, but nothing has changed for me. I'm working to better my sabering skills."

"Have you an instructor on Naboo?" Obi Wan asked.

Anakin colored. "No, Master."

Members of the council looked hither and fro, as they murmured to themselves and each other.

"I felt, some time off was needed for my rehabilitation. I chose to go to Naboo."

"Did Master Obi Wan Kenobi—"

"Master!?" Anakin exclaimed.

"During your rehabilitation, Obi Wan Kenobi was promoted to the rank of Master and is now a member of the council."

Anakin met his eyes: "Congratulations, sir." A proud smile crept across his face.

"Aside from that, you are still a Padawan learner, Young Skywalker, therefore, decisions regarding your rehabilitation will be made by Master Kenobi."

"I... I understand, sir," Anakin said disappointedly. There was no telling where Obi Wan might send him to. And somehow he sensed, the Jedi Master would want to send him as far away from Padme as possible. He knew how deeply Anakin felt for her. Anakin never kept his feelings a secret, and told his master how he dreamt of her more often than a should have. A decision he had come to regret.

"Don't worry Anakin, I've not decided to send you to some faraway rehabilitation center. We have one of the best physical therapy centers in the Republica right here on Coruscant. Your reflexes will be as natural as rain when they're done with you."

Anakin beamed. "Thank you, Master!"

Padme had a place at 500 Republica. If he could get the message to her, she could meet him there.

Obi Wan handed him a sheet of paper. "Report there first thing tomorrow morning, you will begin physical therapy, which will focus on teaching you to interface the prosthetic limb with the nerve endings in your upper arm. Though you are already functioning, you are not quite ready for battle."

"Yes, Master."

Were they done yet? How much talking did they need to do? *Shut up so I can call Padme*, he thought.

3. The Senate Meeting

Padme walked across the room of her suite, twisted then walked back over and over again. Her feet would soon make a path in the rug, a permanent one if she didn't stop.

She sat on the edge of her bed again and hugged her knees to her chest. Where was Anakin? Was he in trouble? Did the council find out about the wedding? Would the marriage be over before it even begun? Would they issue an annulment? There was still time, their marriage had not been consummated.

Threepio walked in the room and saw his mistress in what appeared to be distress. Her face was ashen and her eyes teary.

"Oh Madame, I do hope you're okay," Threepio said, with what sounded like more worry than a droid should know how to express. "Master Skywalker will be back, I'm certain of it."

If her feelings for Anakin Skywalker were plain enough that even a droid could see, then who else knew?

Then again, Threepio was special, so much more than an artificially intelligent machine. To her, he was equal to any sentient being she had spoken to. On more than one occasion he had expressed what sounded like human emotion —

"Threepio..." Padme said,... "Has Anakin called? Do you know if he's okay?"

"Nothing yet, Madame, but I will do my best to keep you informed. I'm very good at that," he offered.

"Thank you, Threepio."

"Also, Madame, there was a delivery moments ago. I have a message to you from the Senate. There's to be an emergency hearing this afternoon. Your presence is requested on Coruscant."

"Did they ask for me specifically, or a member of my delegation?"

"The message was addressed to you, Madame."

Padme turned, leaving her back to face the droid — for a look of terror filled her eyes. "Did they mention, Anakin, by chance?"

"I'm afraid not, Madame."

Padme sighed. They knew. They had to know. There was some consolation in all of this. Despite the scandal their marriage would cause, they would have each other. But if Anakin had to leave the Jedi, would he blame her? *Would he love her anymore?*

Though she hated to shed it, Padme slipped out of her wedding gown and into a more formal dress. When she was done, Threepio reappeared with her burgundy colored senate robe, which she draped over her arm.

Padme met with her guard, Koofie beyond the garden where her ship waited. Unbeknownst to her, a message flashed manically on the holovoid in her room.

Anakin Skywalker tried getting through, but alas, she was already gone.

4. Secrets

Where is she!? Anakin groaned.

He watched the clocked worriedly as the physical therapist toyed with his arm. The therapist was a human woman with long blond hair and large green eyes. She had a pretty smile, but Anakin hardly noticed. Which doesn't mean, she failed to notice him. She was quite taken by the tall, handsome, virile young Jedi and seemed to prolong his treatment.

The woman stretched out his machine hand, and aimed a laser beam at the tip of one of Anakin's fingers. A sharp red light ripped through the end of it.

He snatched his hand away, flinching with the desire to hit her. Strangely, the pain that shot through to the rest of his body.

"I'm sorry," the woman said. "The work on your arm was amazing. Your nerve ends are grafting to the prosthetic perfectly. I assume, the pain in your arms and legs were more acute when I did that."

"I should hope you wouldn't do it again," Anakin said, a hint of threat in his voice.

"No, I won't," the woman replied. "It's a surgery tool, nothing that will damage the material of your new hand. The pain will go away in a few minutes. I wanted to know if your limb is working as it should. Is there anything you want to tell me? Any discomfort?"

"Sometimes... where the flesh of my lower arm meets the prosthetic, there is pain. But only when I move my hand."

"Ah... I see. You need more practice. So, let us meet twice more in a week. I will notify the Council. I have a feeling they want you... or rather, need you back on the battleground. It simply too early for that."

Anakin sighed. But it was a sigh of relief. More time to spend with Padme. If he could play the injury out a bit longer — long enough to have something that resembled a honeymoon, he would be happy. But not too long, he was also ready for war, and ready to defend the Republic. Sometimes, between his wife and his duties — he felt torn between the two. Having it all is harder than it actually sounds.

Padme walked through the Senate hall to the chambers where the special meeting would take place. Along the way, Bail Organa briefed her on the upcoming congregation, news she received with much relief. It seems the chancellor would like to vote himself more power. This time he wanted the power to oversee clone field tactics as Commander in Chief. A job that belonged to Jedi!

What was the Chancellor thinking? The idea that he could orchestrate a war better than the generals out on the battlefield — who would need his orders to make a move would put their

military units in danger. Palpatine's demands grew more and more absurd with each meeting. It seemed he wanted control of... *everything*.

Senator Organa and Padme Amidala stood outside of the congressional hall, waiting for the meeting to start. They spoke feverishly about the Chancellor's new demands. In fact, Padme was so engrossed in the conversation that she didn't see Obi-Wan Kenobi and Anakin Skywalker approach. When she turned, Anakin seemed equally shocked to see her, and both were equally uncomfortable. How might they keep their eyes from lighting up? The joy in them, in having seen each other?

Anakin could not hide the smile that threatened to spread across his face. So much so, that he folded both arms behind his back and looked toward the ground. Perhaps, Obi Wan Kenobi might not see how deeply Anakin felt, how deeply embarrassed he was, and discover their secret. Padme's cheeks were scarlet and suddenly, her words tumbled out of her mouth clumsily.

"Master Kenobi," she said, greeting him first.

"Good to see you, Senator Amidala," he replied, a cheerful gleam in his eyes. "Anakin..." he said.

Anakin looked up. He turned to Bail Organa first, "Good evening Senator Organa."

"Good to—" Bail started.

But Padme was already speaking, and both spoke over each other.

"Good to see you, Anakin..." she said.

Anakin flushed, turned to Padme as nonchalantly as he could muster, **but again, she spoke at the same time:**

"Good to see you, Milady."

"Will you be on Coruscant long?" she couldn't help but ask.

Obi-Wan Kenobi suppressed a smirk. The two couldn't hide their feelings for each other if they tried. But something must have happened between the two for them to behave so awkwardly.

And Anakin only recently left Naboo of all places... how hard was it to put two and two together? They obviously saw each other, and if anything happened beyond that, he'd be hard pressed to think Anakin wasn't behind the whole thing. Anakin wore his feelings for Padme Amidala like a coat of finish — he shined whenever she was around.

At the same time, the Senator looked quite uncomfortable, nervous even. She was a Senator after all and knew an untoward relationship betwixt the two would cause a major scandal. She knew how important he was. She knew he was the Chosen One. That isn't to say she doesn't like Anakin, or even to some degree, shared his feelings. But Padme was wise beyond her years and would never cross the boundaries between them. She would protect Anakin — save him from himself. Or at least he hoped.

Anakin's presence was so acute it was as though he were right there in front of her, breathing down her face. The way he leered at the Senator, as though he might devour her

there in the congressional hall. If Obi-Wan could, he'd bind Anakin around the neck and hold him back, for he feared the young man might dare to try.

Thankfully, Senator Organa didn't seem to notice.

"As I were saying to Senator Amidala... I don't see how the Republic would benefit if the Chancellor were given authority by the delegation to head the Clone Wars as Commander in Chief."

"I agree," Obi Wan started... "And not because the Chancellor has never held such a position, much less, ever stood on a battlefield while the ground is still hot."

"The Chancellor means well," Anakin interrupted.

"Of course he does, Anakin, but the change would cause more red tape than necessary. Decisions must be made and made quickly. In the throes of war, there wouldn't be time to update the Chancellor or seek permission. He's a very busy man," Obi Wan countered.

"I agree," Padme said. It was all she could say at the moment.

Lights in the congressional hall flickered on and Senators and other interested politicians began to trickle inside. Obi Wan Kenobi, Bail Organa entered the hall first. Padme and Anakin followed, their elbows brushing as they walked inside.

5. Nick of Time

After a long and tedious meeting, the bid to keep Palpatine from seizing power on the battlefield was won. A miracle, if anything. Obi-Wan Kenobi noticed a long time ago how successful the Chancellor was when it came to getting what he wanted.

Strangely, they owe not themselves applause for today's victory. It seemed, Palpatine had less interest in actually winning the bid, than he did in seeing who his opponents were.

Obi Wan had been sent by the Council to represent the Jedi. He argued, and quite effectively, for the need of Jedi to remain in control of all battle planning. Yoda was Commander in Chief of all strategies and Mace Windu was his right hand. So far, their efforts at containing the Trade Federation were successful. So why bother with change? It was Palpatine's policies that needed change.

Senator Organa was quite pleased with the results, but also suspicious of the Chancellor's motives. He was far too shrewd a man to think the Jedi or any reasonable senator would approve of his actions. Instead of arguing, Bail Organa watched the event from his chair, offering unbiased support of all sides. It was a matter of keeping his friends close, and enemies of the Republic, even closer... in this case, Palpatine was as big a threat to the Republic as the Trade Federation. He was a kind, gentle, fatherly old man and people liked him. But it was all an act.

Organa decided he would share his suspicions. Though not on this day.

Padme and Anakin sat several rows away from each other, allowing everyone else to leave ahead of them. When the room cleared, they walked cautiously beneath a balcony then slipped into the near darkness behind the column that supported it.

Anakin held Padme's cheeks and kissed her head, cheeks, nose, and lips manically. There was a fluttering in her stomach.

She closed her eyes and rested her head against his chin, happy but worried at the same time.

"I told you... everything would be okay," he assured.

"No one knows?"

"They don't suspect a thing. We can be *together*."

Padme wrapped her arms around his neck and caressed his chin with her forehead.

"I've been ordered to stay here on Coruscant for physical rehabilitiation."

"Then I'll stay at my flat on 500 Republica. When you have time, we'll meet."

"When I have time," he scoffed, bitterly.

Padme ran her fingers through his hair. "We'll have our moment, Anakin. Give it time."

"I've given it ten years."

Padme smirked. "You were just a little boy," she said. "You had no choice."

"I... I just love you so much," he said, pulling her by the shoulders and crushing her against him. "I don't know what I would do without you," he finished.

There was desperation in his voice... so much need. Times like these she wanted to hold him in her arms and rock him.

"Don't ever leave me Padme," he said, looking into her eyes.

"I won't," she answered. He was hurting her.

Suddenly, a familiar voice called out from just around the corner. Before Anakin and Padme could react, Obi-Wan Kenobi and Senator Organa was upon them.

Anakin's eyes were wide with surprise, like a cat with a bird in its mouth. His hands gripped Padme's shoulder. There was a flustered look plastered across her face.

"Anakin?"

It was all Obi-Wan Kenobi could say. Or ask. Senator Organa had yet to close his mouth, for he was gaping at them.

"She fell into my arms—" Anakin replied somewhat defensively.

His hands slid from Padme's shoulders. She straightened her senatorial robes then blinked as though she were confused, or searching her mind for the right words.

"Senator Organa, you were looking for me?" Then looking at Anakin, she spoke again. "Thank you, Anakin. For saving me yet again. I might have taken a terrible fall."

Senator Organa relaxed. For a second, he wasn't quite sure at what he had stumbled upon. Anakin Skywalker was very protective of Senator Amidala. Just as well, he might have sensed her injury and arrived in the nick of time.

Senator Organa and Padme Amidala walked off, discussing all things relating to politics. Obi Wan Kenobi and Anakin Skywalker trailed behind them. Not once, did Anakin's eyes fall from Padme Amidala's stride.

'She fell into his arms? "What does he take me for? A fool? Obi Wan thought.

And what about the look he cast over Padme like a ominous shadow? Obi Wan had seen that look before. Whenever Anakin talked about his mother...

6. Someone from Endor

Anakin and Obi Wan Kenobi separated outside of the Congressional Hall, where throngs of citizens enveloped the Senators and Jedi. A member of that crowd was the chancellor himself... smiling, shaking hands, and kissing babies.

When he was done he walked to Anakin, a kindly old smile fixed upon his benign features.
“Anakin my boy, I trust you are well...”

“Yes, Chancellor.”

“So, tell me, son... what did the others think of my bid? I understand some of the senators, as well as the Jedi disliked the suggestion immensely. Which is why they sent you and Master Kenobi to do the Council’s bidding.”

Anakin looked away. He didn’t like these discussions. He only went to the meeting because Obi Wan asked him to. Or rather, he had no choice but to do what his Master told him.

“I know you had no choice in the matter, son.” Palpatine laid a cold wrinkled hand upon Anakin’s shoulder. The young man shuddered.

“Thank you, sir. I know you mean well.”

“Good, Anakin. I’m glad you understand. Your friendship means everything to me.”

Anakin nodded, happy his friend was not angry with him.

“Senator Amidala was there,” Palpatine said in a conspiratorial voice.

Anakin pretended not to notice.

“Yes, I saw her just outside of congress.”

“She was happy to see you, was she not?”

Anakin’s face turned two shades of red. “Uh, I suppose so,” he stammered.

“Senator Amidala will be very busy the next few weeks,” Palpatine started, sounding like a gossipy old woman. “Such a shame... being so young. She’ll be working closely with Cobra Sien for the next few weeks. He’s very fond of her... **VERY**. You’ve met him, haven’t you? Handsome, tall young man? Recently elected Senator from Endor?”

Anakin flexed the muscle in his jaw. No longer did he look like the tall awkward teen assigned to Padme those weeks ago. Anakin could be downright intimidating. And losing his hand only made him harder... tougher. He’d seen Cobra before. Tall, dark haired, aqua-green eyes, curly-hair... renown artist...

Artist?

The revelation collapsing upon his head like a ton of bricks. Padme did seem a bit *reluctant when he talked to her beneath the balcony. The way she “flinched” when she*

promised never to leave him. Even worse wa that, Cobra was a perfectly suitable mate for a Senator. They shared the same rank and career. Who was he, but a Jedi — as a matter of fact, not even a Jedi, but still a Padawan learner?

Anakin bristled, eyes focused ahead. “Thank you, Chancellor, I must go now,” he blurted.

Anakin raced off, without giving the Chancellor the chance to reply... Padme was still close, he could feel her. His eyes scanned the crowd for her face. And when she saw her, she was with him. Cobra Sien. They were quartered off amongst themselves, engrossed in conversation. Anakin slipped to a corner and watched intently.

Unbeknownst to him, was that Obi Wan Kenobi was not far behind. Anakin was in fact, so focused that he didn’t feel his master’s approach. Obi Wan followed the Padawan’s gaze to Senator Amidala, whose attention was elsewhere.

“Anakin?” Obi Wan called. “Come along, the Council have given us an assignment.”

Anakin didn’t care about the assignment. He couldn’t only think of Padme and their missed wedding night. “What about my rehabilitation?” Anakin asked. “Would the Council send me on a mission when I have physical therapy tomorrow?”

What he meant to say was that he would have Padme tonight, then physical therapy tomorrow.

“Of course not, Anakin. The assignment will be here on Coruscant. At the temple. Master Yoda thought it would be a good idea to have you work with other Padawans.”

At the temple with other Padawans? Who did they think he was? A boy? He lost an arm fighting a Sith Lord — after saving his own Master! He’s already fought the first battle of the Clone Wars and they think...

Anakin turned, his face burning with anger. “After all I’ve done, the Council is sending me to work with the other Padawans? How dare they,” Anakin barked. “This is an insult!”

Obi-Wan laid a hand on Anakin’s shoulder, his face a mask of serenity. “Be calm, Anakin. They’re merely trying to give you something to do while on medical leave. We know how restless you can be. The Council isn’t asking you to train with other Padawans... they are asking you to train them.”

“To train them...?” Anakin couldn’t contain the surprise in his voice. “You mean, like a teacher? Like... a master?”

“Not a master in its fullest sense... but yes. The Council are impressed by you Anakin. You dared to fight a Sith Lord. And you saved me from certain death.”

“You think I’ll become a full fledged Jedi Knight? You think, they’ll send me to take the trials?”

“When the time is right, Anakin. When you are healed.”

Suddenly, Anakin was smiling again. “Thank you, Master. I’m honored.” Suddenly, he was breathless... but he couldn’t fully enjoy his newfound success. *Padme. If she wanted someone else...* he couldn’t even think it.

Obi-Wan smiled, glad the boy wasn't fixating on Senator Amidala again... instead showing concern for his career.

7. Good morning Master Skywalker

Obi Wan Kenobi grabbed Anakin by the arm and pulled him off. But the Padawan spun around, trying for one last look at Padme. She and Cobra walked off, going to whereabouts unknown.

Together.

"Easy, Anakin..." Obi Wan said. "Is something upsetting you?"

"No, Master," Anakin replied uneasily.

"You'll need your rest. The Padawan learners can be a handful. But, I'm sure you would already know that."

Obi Wan smiled and Anakin couldn't resist a chuckle.

"Of course, Master."

Face it. If the marriage is going to work, I'll have to trust her. Why marry me anyway if she's going to run off with someone else? he thought. This would have been Obi-Wan Kenobi's answer... the way he might have answered if he could talk to him. Funny, how he could predict his Master's words. So ingrained was Obi Wan's teachings that his words often flew out of Anakin's mouth... on more than one occasion. And frequently, did they creep into his thoughts when he was troubled, making him calm again.

But then, there was sometimes the malevolent reply, which often came from a cavern deep within his soul:

Maybe, this someone would have more time to spend with Padme. Maybe, because this someone shared her rank, could marry her and celebrate their love openly. Maybe because she wouldn't have to live a lie... he could give her more than you ever could.

ANAKIN SHOOK.

After another restless night without Padme, a night of twisting and turning and wishing his hands were upon her soft fragrant skin... he went to the Jedi Temple training room to meet his Padawan students.

Master! They would call *him* Master! Anakin couldn't help but smile.

With a wave of his hand he moved the sliding door aside and walked into the training room. He looked around. Before him was a group of restless two and three year old children. Some slept, some ran in circles, some were curled into a ball, crying. Some were drooling.

He stood there, mouth agape... **This is my class?** Somehow he had expected a group of well disciplined 10 year olds, or maybe, if he were lucky, a group of 13-15 year olds standing like army of men, lightsabers already drawn.

He quietly waited for the children to notice him. Seeing an older Jedi, would absolutely prompt them to attention. Obi Wan was on his way. In his quiet meditation, Anakin could feel him.

Obi Wan entered seconds later and placed a comforting hand on Anakin's shoulder.

"When you said 'work with other Padawans', I didn't know you meant for me to babysit."

Obi-Wan laughed in his genteel way, creases crinkling the corner of his eyes.

"We've all had to do it, Anakin. It's a right of passage."

Still, Anakin didn't appreciate being tricked, even though he could see the humor in it.

"I remember... shortly after Qui Gon died, just before I was knighted, Master Yoda ordered me to his chambers and gave me the assignment of 'training' the Padawan learners."

"I remember that."

"Yes, you were among them. The oldest in class, as a matter of fact."

"Now I understand why you had that look on your face."

"Seeing the children was quite a shock. After all, I had only destroyed a Sith Lord. I fully expected an older class."

"Tell me something, Master. Did you use the dark side?"

"The dark side?"

"To defeat Darth Maul? Is that how you beat him?"

"I may be a Jedi, Anakin... but I'm still human."

"Because you loved Master Qui Gonn?"

It was an open wound, even eleven years later. Obi-Wan simply smiled. Qui Gon was the closest he had ever come to having a father.

"The point, Anakin, is that, while I was surprised to have the children there, and little disappointed, I was happy to see you. It was their way of saying they had accepted my decision to train you. And that made me happier than you can ever imagine."

"I'm to look at the bigger picture then? That this gesture, by the council was their way of accepting me? To show me that I am soon to become a Jedi Knight?"

Obi Wan squeezed Anakin's muscular shoulder, causing his mechanical hand to spring open. The children laughed.

"I suppose I should interpret this as a sign that they're paying attention."

"Indeed it is," Obi-Wan replied, seeming to answer both of Anakin's questions at once.

A few toys laid scattered about the floor. Silver colored plastic balls, Jedi action figures, toy light sabers...

Anakin raised a hand and the toys seemed to come to life, rising from its place on the floor to float mid-air.

“Good morning class, I’m Master Skywalker, and this is Master Kenobi.”

In unison, the children replied:

“Good morning, Master Skywalker. Good morning Master Kenobi...”

“Everyone one of you are to pick an object from the air... pluck it really, and balance it in your hand.”

The children, one by one began to pluck the floating objects from the air and hold them outward in their tiny palms. Even the children who were crying, probably new to the temple had wiped their tears away, in awe of Anakin’s trick, to participate.

“I will be teaching you, not only what the Force means... but how to use it. I’m sure, some of you know already, which is why you are here.”

8. The Picnic?

Padme walked into her suite at 500 Republica and collapsed on a large brown chaise. She raised a hand to her forehead and cringed in frustration.

She missed her husband.

Their careers threatened to keep them even further apart, now with her writing that bill with Senator Sien at Palpatine's suggestion. A great bill, at that allotting a certain amount of the republic's budget to serve the poor. Who could resist it? Even if she was working with a man who on more than one occasion had been quite flirtatious with her.

Not that it mattered, or that he could sway her. Her heart belonged to one man. A Jedi.

Threepio took mini-steps into the living room then a few more down a tiny flight of stairs, wishful that he should not fall again and bend one of his plates.

"You summoned me, Milady?" he asked.

"Yes, Threepio. I need you to go to the temple. I have a message I'd like you to deliver. But it must, it absolutely must be held in the strictest confidence. You will give it to no one but Master Skywalker, understand?"

"Yes, Madame."

"Oh Threepio, it's so urgent, and so utterly private."

"I understand, you have my word, Madame. I would never surrender the correspondance, not even the threat of a scrap yard would deter me from my mission."

"Thank you, Threepio. I knew I could count on you."

He turned, and quite human-like, looked at Padme: "Always Madame... Always..."

Padme smiled warmly at the droid then gave him a pink envelope. Threepio slipped the letter into a hidden compartment beneath his shoulder plate then trotted out of the room. He "liked" the Senator. She was one of few humans who treated him like a real person. And he was eternally grateful.

When Threepio was finally gone, boarding the ship with Typho, Padme peeled the robe she wore from her body, revealing the strapless empire style dress beneath. She walked to the veranda, all the way to the edge. Her hand gripped the balcony as a gentle breeze blew soft big curls about her head.

Where are you? Padme muttered. She loved Anakin but couldn't help but wonder if this was a sign. If the wedding was just a big mistake? She wanted to feel her husband's strong muscular arms around her, to feel his lips pressed upon hers... Padme cringed.

When did it happen? On Naboo? So suddenly? Why was his seduction so hard to resist? Why was it so hard to reject his marriage proposal knowing everything about it was wrong? These were questions she had not yet addressed. She asked him once, if he were using a Jedi

Mind Trick against her. He told her only the weak minded were susceptible. But with Anakin being so strong in the force, who is to say, he hadn't imposed his will on her? Convinced her into loving him? Jedi Mind Tricked her into accepting his proposal? The dishonesty and lies went against all that she stood for... and yet she couldn't resist.

They've been of one mind since he was assigned to protect her those weeks ago on Naboo. Even now, she couldn't stop thinking of him — not even long enough to fulfill her political duties. All she could think about was being with Cobra Sien alone in her suite tonight and what Anakin might think. If he would **approve**...

Padme sighed. She didn't want to anger him. Was she in love? Or was she afraid?

Padme turned away from the balcony angrily. *I love Anakin, I could never be afraid of him*, she thought.

But despite her vehement declaration, it was the voice of doubt that answered:

What about the sand people? it asked.

"It was a mistake!" she shouted, as though she were speaking to someone else. Suddenly exhausted, Padme spun around and looked up, tears swelling in her eyes. She found herself looking right at Cobra Sien.

"Senator!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, Senator Amidala. We were meeting tonight? No?"

Flustered, she straightened her dress, pulling it high enough to cover her bosom. She was so lost in her thoughts, that she had forgotten to change.

"Are you alright?" Cobra asked.

"Yes, I'm quite fine, just a little... out of sorts," Padme answered, brushing a strand of hair from her eye. "You have something for me? Your provisions?"

"Yes," he answered. "But, before we settle down for business, I am quite hungry, Madame. Would you like to take a walk in the park? Share a meal, perhaps? I have a picnic basket..."

"Oh, Cobra, I can't."

"Please... I beg you," he replied, a charming smile spreading across his face.

Padme cringed. "Fine, but no walk in the park," she said, pointing her finger accusingly. "You'll have to eat here. I have plans and wish to be done soon."

"Another meeting?"

Padme pretended not to hear him.

Cobra left the veranda, then came back a few minutes later, meeting her in the living room with a picnic basket and blanket. Padme watched, mouth open as he spread the blanket at center of the room, right on the floor then set the picnic basket on top. He gestured for her to join him, and Padme, electronic databoard in hand, reluctantly sat down.

Cobra opened the basket, laying fruit, meat, wine, and bread before them.

"I find it somewhat ironic that we would enjoy a lavish meal, as we write a bill to help the poor and starving," Padme commented.

"Ironic, but not against the law," Cobra replied.

Anakin was frugal when it came to eating. He understood charity, the poor, and abstaining from excessive amounts of food. Cobra on the other hand came from a wealthy family and didn't care to understand such things. How he came to work with her on such a sensitive matter was beyond her understanding. What was the chancellor thinking?

Cobra slurped and smacked on pieces of fruit, and at one point, tried to stuff a piece of cheese in her mouth... an effort at being romantic no doubt. He was no Anakin, indeed. There was not a subtle bone in the man's body.

9. At last the wedding night!

Anakin left the training room, completely wiped out. Chasing children around for hours, wasn't as easy as it looked. Obi Wan Kenobi waited just outside the door, eager for an update on Anakin's first day.

"How was it?" he asked.

"Uplifting. Thank you, Master. You can't imagine how much this has meant to me."

Anakin was in an unusually cheerful mood. More than several days had passed since he and Padme married, and two since he had seen her last — but somehow, the children had made him happy.

"Although... there was one Padawan learner who was quite resistant."

"Really?" Obi-Wan asked. "Which one would that be?"

"Ronan Powo Ka."

"Ah... the clairvoyant."

"Aren't we all clairvoyant?"

"The child's gift is stronger than that of any other Jedi, even those of adult age."

"Even stronger than Yoda's?"

"Sometimes..." Obi-Wan answered.

"He doesn't seem to like me much."

"I wonder then, what he might have seen...?" This piqued Obi-Wan's curiosity.

"You assume his reluctance has something to do with me?" Anakin was quite offended. And just as suddenly as he had taken offense, did his mood begin to sour.

"No, well... I don't know. I assume you ought to find out."

Obi-Wan slapped Anakin across the shoulder then drifted off, a smile across his face. Again, Anakin was at ease. It didn't seem that the Jedi Master had meant any harm. When Obi Wan was finally out of sight, a gleaming protocol droid turned the corner at the other end of the hall. He moved quickly. As quickly as a droid of his type could possibly move.

"Threepio!" Anakin exclaimed.

"Master Skywalker!" Threepio screamed. "I have a letter from Senator Amidala, it's most urgent!" he said, waving it about in the air.

"*SHH!!!* Has anyone seen it?" Anakin asked the droid in a hushed voice.

"No sir, I was most discreet."

Anakin turned and walked to the training room again, leaving the slow walking droid to dawdle behind. With a wave of his hand, the door opened. Anakin slipped inside then ripped the letter open.

In Padme's handwriting, the letter read: "Tonight, my love."

Anakin pressed the letter against his chest and sighed heavily. Traces of Padme's Force-scent was all over it. He shoved the letter in his pocket then hurried out. As he came by Threepio again, who had not yet made it to the training room, he stopped and whispered:

"You will stay at the temple tonight, Senator Amidala and I will be busy — tell no one," he whispered, brusquely.

"Of course, Master."

The confused protocol droid stared after the departing Jedi... "Humans!" he muttered in mock astonishment.

Cobra Sien had finally gone. And Padme was glad. She locked the door behind him by way of entering a security code — something she had forgotten to do earlier.

She ran to her room.

Padme stripped out of her dress and took a shower, vigorously scrubbing her hand, where the foul stink of Cobra's touch had lingered. Something Anakin, no doubt, might have sensed.

When she was done she blew her hair dry then brushed it feverishly. *How long til Anakin arrived?* She paced to her room and searched the lingerie cabinet for something pretty to wear, settling on the gown she might have worn on their wedding night — had it gone as planned. A revealing number, with strategically placed coverings. She put a thin silk robe over it then ushered the servants and droids out of the flat for the night.

When they were gone, she sprayed a little fragrance on her fingertips then ran them through her hair. When she was done, she sprayed her fingers again and dabbed them behind her ears.

The doorbell rang.

Padme's heart began to flutter, and her hands began to shake. **At long last — he was here.** Padme ran to the door, entered the security code and flung it open. But it wasn't Anakin who stood on the other side.

"Cobra?" she exclaimed, unable to contain her surprise.

Cobra's eyes dropped to Padme's gown, then grew to the size of saucers. She pulled the robe she wore closed as Cobra shoved his way inside of the apartment.

"What are you doing here?" she gasped.

"I forgot my picnic basket."

"This is totally unacceptable," Padme snapped.

"I will only be a moment," Cobra insisted.

Padme watched as he dropped to his knee over the picnic blanket and stuffed remnants of their meal back into the basket. Just as he had gathered the blanket, the door to Padme's flat slid open.

Her heart stopped... probably for several seconds. She looked to the door, then back to Cobra again.

"Anakin!" Padme exclaimed. Various emotions ran through her... feelings of surprise, joy, embarrassment—"

Cobra stood and looked at the Jedi, an arrogant sneer spread across his face.

"I can explain..." Padme started.

Anakin pulled the letter she had written him out of his pocket then tore it in half.

"The letter... wasn't me for me, was it?"

A look of worry intermingled with hurt filled Padme's eyes. "I can explain," she gasped.

"Explain? Whatever for? And you are?" Cobra demanded.

"Her husband." Anakin blinked.

Padme lurched over, suddenly unable to breathe. In two words — their careers were over. **Ruin**. *How could he?* Her hand gripped the back of the sofa. But Anakin's eyes were trained on Cobra. He was seconds away from wiping the floor with his smug face.

Anakin's walk across the room was slow and deliberate. He looked at the picnic basket on the floor then back at Padme again.

"It's not what you think—" she tried to explain.

But there was a storm in Anakin's heart. A typhoon. Never had he felt so hurt — this was as bad as watching his mother die on Tatooine. His trust was not easily earned. **He loved her, how could she?**

"Cobra... please *leave*," Padme demanded.

But faster than she could blink, Anakin was already on him. His mechanical hand tore into the Senator's neck as he slammed him into a wall, at once, shattering one of Cobra's ribs.

Cobra wheezed, unable to breathe.

"Anakin! *Please*, stop it!" Padme pleaded.

And with that, hearing the terror and sadness in her voice, Anakin released him. Cobra slid to the floor in a quivering heap. Anakin grabbed the man by the collar and shook him.

"Speak of what I have told you to anyone... and I **will** destroy you." Anakin's lip quivered. Padme had not seen him this angry since that horrible night on Tatooine.

Cobra nodded.

Anakin pulled him from the floor then shoved him out of the door. When he was done, he turned a heated look unto Padme. She shook her head, then stumbled back.

They held each other's gaze for several moments, then suddenly, Anakin stormed away, out onto the veranda. The last thing he wanted was for Padme to see him cry. A stream of tears rushed down his cheeks. It took every ounce of restraint within him, to stop himself from crushing her. When he was hurt, there was a need to destroy that which caused him pain. Even if it were Padme.

Padme watched Anakin. She stood where the living room and veranda met.

She had faith in him. What happened on this night was based on a misunderstanding. He was hurting. But not because of Cobra or what he thought he had seen. It was his mother. Anakin had not been given the chance to properly grieve. As a result, he was a like volcano erupting..

"It was all a big misunderstanding," Padme pleaded.

Even a fool could see, that despite his strength and abilities, Anakin was fragile. He wiped a tear away, still unable to speak.

"We were working on a bill."

"Dressed like that?" Anakin spat.

"I wore this for you."

Padme walked across the veranda and wrapped her arms around Anakin's waist, laying her head against his back.

"We've waited so long..." she muttered. "Don't let a misunderstanding ruin it for us."

Anakin peeled her arms away with his mechanical hand. Without turning around, he muttered, "I just don't know what I will do without you," he said. "I can't breathe without you, Padme."

"When I said I'd never leave you, I meant it."

And finally, he was able to face her. Unwashed tears made her face a blur. "I thought you were gone forever. That he would take you away from me. That you would realize that you're too good for me."

"Too good for you!?" Padme exclaimed. "But Anakin... we're equals... how could you think such a thing?"

"We're equals... but you're good. And wise."

Padme rubbed his cheek. "And so are you."

He was almost convinced, but wondered how she could say such a thing after what he had done tonight.

Anakin held her by the shoulders, then let his fingers trail up and down her arm.

"Anakin, I'm cold. Let's go inside."

And suddenly, it was as though nothing had ever happened.

It was only hours ago, that Padme tried wondered why she loved him so much. Alas, the answer had finally revealed itself. Anakin was unlike anyone she had met before. He was wild and free... an emotional storm. So unlike the formal, emotionally restrained people she had lived with for most of her life. With him, she was ifree/i. Free to nurture, free to love.

Anakin swooped Padme off of her feet and carried her into the flat. He strides were long, strong, swift, erratic... she wrapped her arms around his neck, her heart beating rapidly... her hands shaking. Anakin wiped an errant strand of hair from her eyes. She caught him by the back of his hand and kissed it.

They held each other's gaze as they walked through the apartment.

Soon, the door to Padme's bedroom slid open. **Their** bedroom. She slipped from his arms onto her feet and waited. The newlyweds blushed profusely as Anakin untied his sashed and ripped his tunic open.

"After you," he said, motioning her toward the bed. Anakin slid out of his undershirt and stood bare chested on the other side of the room.

How awkward, Padme thought. And now, she was terrified.

Padme's silk robe dropped to the floor and he gasped, her milky skin luminous in the hazy moonlight that streamed through the window. He walked toward her, his eyes fixed upon her face. Suddenly, his comlink beeped.

A look of horror crept into Padme's eyes, then an amused smiled as he crushed the receiver in the palm of his mechanical hand and tossed it across the room.

"Was that Obi Wan? Do you think — it might be important?"

"More important than this?" Anakin asked, as his lips covered hers.

Padme stood on her toes, arms wrapped around his neck. He gathered her toward him, wrapping her legs around his waist before falling forward, so that she fell onto the bed beneath him.

He kissed her hungrily, as though he were ravaging her...

Ten long years he had waited... and finally, she was his.

10. With You

This chapter may not be for younger readers or for readers who don't like (slightly) racy material. As always, thanks for reading. Your feedback is ALWAYS welcome and appreciated. — CG

Anakin and Padme laid in bed, a tangled mesh of post coital **bliss**. He rested with the back of his head pressed between her exposed bosom as she ran a hand through his hair, watching as the bouncy blonde curls sprang to life between her fingers.

They were married. In **every** sense of the word.

He tilted his head back, peering at her from the top of his eyes as he stroked her upper arm with his mechanical hand.

"I didn't know it would be like this..." he said.

Padme smiled. "Nor did I."

He raised the other hand, and stroked her other arm, both of his hands caressing her skin at the same time.

"Let's do it again," he said, with a devilish smile.

"Anakin!" Padme wailed, face ablush.

"Did I say something wrong?"

"No, of course not, I'm just..."

"Embarrassed still? You should probably get used to this..." he suggested in a matter-of-fact tone.

Padme groaned and covered her cheeks with both hands.

"I still... can't believe..."

"We're here..." he grumbled, finishing her sentence.

"It's not you, I love you, I'm glad we're here together."

"ah huh..." Anakin replied.

"It's just so surreal," she explained. If I close my eyes for even a second I have a flashback of... well... *everything*... Is this normal?"

Padme paused.

"Anakin?"

She pulled his head back and looked at his face. Anakin was already fast asleep.

Padme sighed.

Obi Wan Kenobi sat on the edge of his bed in a lonely little room inside of the Jedi Temple. His home away from home. He sat very still, and very close to tears holding a comlink in his hand...

Static laughter rang through the receiver. He could hear them talking and there was no way to turn it off.

And how it tortured him.

He tried to transmit a message to Anakin but the comlink went dead for several minutes, then clicked on again, the button apparently crushed in the “talk” configuration.

“Oh my, Anakin... what have you done?”

Unable to bear it any longer, Obi Wan slipped into his brown cloak and left his room for the temple hall. There, he ran into the little golden protocol droid, See-Threepio.

“Threepio? What are you doing here? And where is Anakin?” he asked. He prayed the little droid would tell him something different. That it all was just a big misunderstanding. Would Anakin take advantage of Senator Amidala?

Would she let him?

“Oh! Master Kenobi, I’m not at liberty to say.”

Obi-Wan grimaced. “Then perhaps I might say it for you. I understand Anakin is at Senator Amidala’s apartment, is he not?”

“*Senator Amidala...*” Threepio mused...

“Yes. That would be, the senator whose apartment you reside in.” Obi Wan’s mouth compressed into a thin white line.

“Ohh, **that** Senator Amidala. Well, respectfully sir, if I were there, then I might have a better sense of whether Anakin is there also. But since I am here, I have no way of telling.”

Droid logic, Obi-Wan thought. “I shall be there soon enough to find out. Thank you, Threepio, I’m sure Master Skywalker appreciates your loyalty.”

“You’re going to Senator Amidala’s apartment? Oh! No no no! Master Kenobi, please don’t. They... love each other.”

He didn’t know what love was, but knew from his own impersonal artificial experience, that love must have been something worth having if it were anything like that which he had been programmed by Master Skywalker to long for.

Threepio tried to assume the begging position, but forgot his knees were not made to bend... gold plates and all.

Obi-Wan rubbed his beard and paced the hall. Turn him in to the council? Have him expelled? What would Qui Gon do? Qui Gon once told him, some rules should be broken, if

it would benefit the greater good. Anakin was the chosen one. If he left the Order... then how would he bring balance to the Force?

Obi-Wan retreated, walking back to his little lonely room in the Jedi Temple. He slipped out of his cloak, then sat on the edge of the bed.

He knew all too well what Anakin was going through.

11. Secrets and goodbyes

A ring of children surrounded Anakin. It was dark, with flickerings of light, a three-dimensional hologram of several systems in orbit over their heads. But not even the cute, angelic little faces of his toddler-aged padawans were enough to stop him from thinking of Padme.

Their night of passion played over and over again in his mind. How surreal it was, to think of his “boss” that way.

The Jedi reported to the Senate. And Padme was a powerful Senator with direct connections to the Temple. In fact, she was there... a few rooms away, in a meeting with Yoda and several members of the council. How odd it was to walk by her... to pretend that they were little more than polite acquaintances. To nod, and feign distraction when all he wanted to do was kiss her.

Suddenly acutely aware that the children were watching, some even prying into his thoughts, Anakin pointed to Geonosis. “And there, is where the evil bad guys trapped the heroes.”

“Did they kill the queen?” came the soft voice of one of the padawan learners. It was a little girl with long red pigtails...

“Oh no, the heroes were confident that the Force was with them. Just before the evil droid army opened fire, the other Jedi arrived to save the day.”

“Did the queen give the heroes a reward?”

“Well... she wasn’t a queen anymore. But a senator. And the only reward to be had, was that she was safe, and the mission was a success.”

Anakin pointed to an area on the hologram. “Can anyone tell me where this is?”

“Naboo,” a little blue alien padawan answered.

“That’s where the senator lived... happily ever after.”

Nanomagi, a five-year old padawan raised his hand. Anakin pointed, signaling to the child to ask his question.

“Did the hero go with her?”

“Excuse me?” Anakin replied, his face suddenly red.

“Did the hero go with her?”

“Well... the heroes are Jedi. So, they went back to the temple. But the senator went to Naboo and lived happily ever after them.”

Suddenly, the children laughed. For the life of him, Anakin couldn’t figure out why the children found the end of the story so funny, but found himself smiling.

With a wave of his hand, the hologram was off and the lights were on. “That’s enough for the afternoon. Please, have lunch, we’ll resume when the Xatne and Crothro 30 degrees east.”

In unison, the children replied:

“Yes, Master Skywalker.”

A servant droid entered the training room almost on cue to escort the children to the eating area. Obi-Wan Kenobi stood in the doorway, watching with his arms folded across his chest.

“That was quite a story,” the master said. “And quite an ending,” he added somewhat bitterly. .

Anakin turned and regarded the master, his senses probing. He looked at him with unassuming crystal clear blue eyes. Obi-Wan couldn’t help but think how innocent those eyes used to be.

“Is something wrong, Master?”

But now those eyes have seen more action than *he* did. And he didn’t mean out on the battlefield...

“Come along, Anakin. The Council would like to have a word with you.”

The tone of Obi-Wan’s voice was ominous. Anakin shuddered. He wondered if somehow, the Council had found out about him and Padme.

“Did I do something wrong?” Anakin replied.

Obi-Wan looked over his shoulder. “The Council will decide.”

Anakin entered the Council meeting room, his hand folded before him, head declined. Padme Amidala was there, chewing her bottom lip, watching as the investigation unfolded. Seeing her made the hair on his neck rise.

The Council members sat in a circle, chairs cusping their broken battle weary bodies, their faces stern... Yoda banged his gimer stick onto the floor.

“Young Skywalker... disturbing news received I have.”

Anakin could barely bring himself to look at the Master, for he feared his eyes would give everything away.

Mace Windu, eager to move the proceeding ahead, spoke next. It often took Yoda several moments to compose his words — he was ever conscious of choosing them wisely.

“The Council received a report regarding an incident which took place at Senator Amidala’s apartment. Why was the council not apprised of this event?”

“I’m sorry, Master...?”

“Anakin...” Obi-Wan interceded. The Council would like you to recount the events that took place at Senator Amidala’s apartment last night.

Obi-Wan watched him intently. He hoped Anakin would do the right thing. Tell the truth. Tell the truth about his affair with Padme, there was still time to undo their mistake. At least, that which could be undone.

"There was incident involving Senator Sien last night. I understand you were responsible for saving Senator Amidala from several inappropriate advances."

Anakin swallowed. "Yes, uh... Master... I arrived at Senator Amidala's apartment. Senator Sien there. He behaved in a manner unbefitting a gentleman and so I came to her aid."

"The Chancellor has submitted a report — Senator Cobra Sien has been placed on administrative leave, pending an investigation. Your cooperation..." Mace drawled... "would be greatly appreciated."

"Have I done something wrong?" Anakin asked.

"No. You did everything right. Your job, as a Jedi, is to protect the Republic. We serve the senate. Although, corruption and poor behavior from those we are here to serve, will not be tolerated. We will submit our findings to the Chancellor, and he will determine Senator Sien's fate. Thank you, Anakin."

Anakin bowed, grateful the matter had not been explored any further. He turned on his heels, catching a disappointed look from Obi Wan and a gleam in Padme's eye.

Suddenly, Master Windu spoke again:

"One more question... how did you know that Senator Amidala was in trouble?"

Anakin paused in his stride, turned, and regarded the hardened Jedi... "I sensed it, Master."

"Again, thank you, Young Skywalker." Then looking around, he spoke to the room: "Meeting adjourned."

Anakin swept into the hall, dark brown robe whirling about him. He caught Padme's signal to meet him in the garden near the capital — their secret meeting place — far away from the prying eyes of the Jedi Masters. He was eager to see her, eager to touch her, relieved their love would remain a secret... *for now*.

He hurried to the landing dock and climbed into a waiting starfighter. The trip to the capital was short, close to where he and Padme lived at 500 Republica. But to meet there in broad daylight was too risky. There were shades, trees, and wooded areas and gazebos to hide under at the garden. It was Padme's favorite place. The flowers and green grass to her, was like a little piece of Naboo.

He made it to the garden first and paced the grounds, back and forth until the ground that remained in his wake was a patch of dirt. After waiting there for a while, he looked to the sky. The planets had aligned, it was almost time to go back to the temple. Suddenly a figure moved near the bushes, fruit dropped from the branches.

"Anakin!" Padme called in a hushed voice.

Anakin raced toward her, wrapped his arms around her waist, then swept her off of her feet. He spun her around, planting kisses on her face. But Padme was unresponsive. He

lowered her to the ground, looking into her eyes. “What’s wrong?”

“Anakin,” she whispered, her body quivering... “I... I can’t do this. I can’t live this lie.”

She was in full panic attack mode. Tears welled at the corner of her eyes.

“What happened?” he asked in a flat voice.

Padme gulped, looked toward the ground. “I’m a senator Anakin...” a tear fell from her eye... “I should have known better... I can’t do this to you. I’m ruining your life.”

“What about yours?”

“I don’t care about mine! Anakin, you’ve only just begun.”

“I don’t care,” he answered. He grabbed Padme by the shoulders. “Why are you saying this? What changed?”

“The Council.”

“They know?”

“Of course not!” she gasped.

“Then why are you doing this to me?”

“When I was spoke to the council... the way they looked at me.” She pushed her hands into her temple... “The way they tried to read my thoughts —— I couldn’t handle it,” she cried.

More tears fell.

“They know nothing,” Anakin said in a harsh voice. “You’re a senator. You’ve been in situations like this before.”

“I don’t want to ruin your life!”

“These are just excuses.”

He let Padme go so suddenly that she snapped back. She looked around, to see if anyone was watching. But Anakin was already near her again, wrapping his arms around her waist. “I’m sorry, Padme. I just... I don’t like when you talk that way.”

“I have no one but myself to blame. I was weak.”

She met his eyes, tears spilling from her own.

“This has to end.”

“What if I don’t want it to end?” he replied.

“Anakin!” she wailed. “It’s hard enough... just—” her voice trailed. Anakin brought his face to hers and kissed her. Padme pulled away. “Anakin... it’s over.”

He met her eyes, a hardened look in his own:

“You might be a senator and I a Jedi... but I am your husband. At home you do as I command. Not the other way around.”

He turned, pulled a branch from a nearby tree and fleeced the leaves from one of its stems, then fell into his thoughts. Padme gave him a blank stare.

There was something different about him now. He was no longer the doe eyed boy with a crush... but a man with a swagger about him. Newfound confidence, that her love had given him.

After a few moments he turned and looked at her. "I know why you're saying this. You're feelings betray you. You're afraid. I can sense it."

He laid a hand on her arm, then placed the other on the small of her back. "I love you Padme. I don't want to lose you. Everything I have ever done, I did to win your heart. I cannot lose you now." There was a look of desperation in his eyes, and suddenly, her heart melted. She was afraid. Afraid of what might happen to them, should their secret become known. But, she couldn't let a thing like fear take the man she loved away from her, and her from him.

If she were anything like Anakin, she would be braver, willing to accept the consequences for their actions. Their love was more than that. They were more than their careers and bigger than the obstacles laid before their paths.

Padme laid her head on his chest. "Oh, Anakin, I'm so sorry! You were right. I was afraid."

He sighed. Suddenly relieved. "Then let us be together," he answered. He brought his face forward, and kissed her on the lips.

12. A Normal Day

A Normal Day:

Padme stood on the veranda. The suns were setting and the sky was purple with striking hues of gold lighting the horizon. But Padme's eyes were locked a starfighter. Her husband's starfighter... which was flying toward her from a spire atop the Jedi Temple...

The ship circled 500 Republica, then came around and landed safely on the docking bay. The hatch opened, and Anakin climbed out. The wind assailed Padme's dress as she raced toward him and wrapped her arms around his neck. He squeezed, his hug lifting her from her feet.

He set Padme down, and she grabbed him by the ears and kissed his cheeks. Anakin smiled, then slipped out of his cloak.

"How was physical therapy today?" she asked.

"I didn't go."

Padme gave him a weary look. "Anakin... you missed another appointment? They'll begin to suspect us."

"You worry too much," he said with a smile.

"Someone has to," Padme replied.

Anakin followed her to the dining room, where dinner sat on the table. He slid the black glove he wore from his mechanical hand, sat, then laid it across his lap. Padme sat at the other end, a plate of vegetables before her, and proceeded to eat.

"Have you spoken to Obi-Wan?"

"Yes."

"Is he well?"

Anakin frowned then looked at his plate. "I suppose."

"And the chancellor? Is he well?"

"*Anakin...*"

"What? You can ask about Obi-Wan but I can't ask about the Chancellor?"

"The Chancellor is the last person on Coruscant that I wish to talk about much less think about when I'm with you."

"Now you know how I feel."

"I thought you loved Obi Wan."

"He's like a father to me. Well, more like a brother, now."

"Then what's wrong?"

"Nothing," Anakin replied in a flat voice. He didn't mind talking about Obi Wan. He just didn't like talking about him with her.

"He stopped by today. He said he was looking for you."

"Looking for me? Here?" Anakin's eyebrows were raised quite high, Padme could tell she had taken him by surprise.

"We shared a cup of tea. He was kind enough to run an errand for me."

And now, Anakin was done eating. He rose from the table and walked to the bedroom. Padme took a sip of water, and another bite of food. When she was done, she followed him to the room, and found him sitting in the dark, sulking.

"Anakin? Is something wrong?

Padme leaned against the doorway, her hand against the panel.

"What kind of errands did you have for Obi Wan to do?"

When was the last time Obi Wan ran an errand? A long time ago, he might have called his Padawan to do it for him. But Anakin sensed, Obi Wan was trying to keep him and Padme apart.

She gave him a strange look.

"Well... he delivered a message to the chancellor... and took the chancellor's reply to Master Yoda... Have I upset you?"

Anakin looked over his shoulder, his eyes meeting hers.

"You didn't ask me."

"Of course, not. Sometimes, I think you want them to catch us," Padme chided. "I suspect, the council is waiting to see us together again. Why draw more attention to ourselves than necessary?"

Anakin smiled. "You suspect? Or sense? You should have been a Jedi."

Padme walked across the room and sat on the bed beside him. "I married a Jedi. That's good enough for me."

She smiled. Anakin pushed her back against the bed then climbed over her.

"I wouldn't have it any other way," he replied.

"Why do you love me?" she asked.

"Who couldn't love you?" This, was becoming a pressing worry for him anyway.

Anakin's hand met her underarm and Padme laughed.

"Please don't tickle me Anakin, I'm much too old for that."

"Too old for this?" he asked, kissing her neck.

"Not old enough," she countered.

He pressed the weight of his body against her. "Has the shock worn off now? Do I have permission to make love to my wife?" he unbuttoned her dress.

Padme smiled and caressed his cheek with her hand. "The shock will never wear off, I can't believe I married you Ani."

He held her gaze. "Is that a good thing or a bad thing?"

"It's a beautiful thing," she laughed. "When the war is over, I hope you retire so that we might celebrate our love openly."

"I don't care one or another. My love is here whether the world knows or not."

"What if we were to have children?"

"Who wants children?" Anakin laughed. "I want you to myself."

"I want lots of little Ani's running around the house. I think you will make a wonderful father."

"Do you really?" he asked. Anakin seemed rather surprised.

"Of course."

"The Jedi may try to steal them," he replied in a serious tone.

"They might. If they can find us," Padme smiled. "We'll move into a villa on Rea and live by the ocean..." she said. "No one will find us. No one will know where we are..."

He rubbed a hand across her belly, and sensed... *knew*, his child would someday be nestled there. Just as he knew he would marry her someday.

"Now?" he asked.

"When the time is right, my love."

Anakin's face adopted a desirous look as he gazed upon her. His hand traveled up her leg to settle on her inner thigh. Suddenly, he leaned forth and kissed her belly, then let his mouth trail to her neck.

Padme opened his shirt and let her hand slide down his chest to his muscular abdomen. Her hand rested at the top of his pants. Anakin threw the covers back then peeled out of his shirt. They escaped beneath the covers, tossing their clothes to the side of the bed.

13. Tug O War

I JUST POSTED A CHAPTER BEFORE THIS ONE, TWO IN ONE NIGHT IF YOU MISSED IT. As always, thanks for reading — CG

Anakin slept as sound as boca dragon in hibernation. His snores seemed to rise to the heavens, while Padme laid beside him, soundly awake! Her legs shook violently, in the aftermath of their lovemaking. She stared into the darkness, her mind on the future... focused on a time where their lives would no longer be a secret, and they could rejoice in the love they had found in each other.

Suddenly, Anakin jolted upright. As though someone had doused him with a bucket of water.

Padme turned and looked at her husband, reaching out to place a hand on his arm. Drops of sweat poured down the side of his face.

"Obi-Wan knows."

"What?"

"He's here," Anakin said. There was a twinge of worry in his voice. Then suddenly, a loud knock upon the door.

"Do something, hide!" Padme exclaimed.

And let her suffer the consequences for their actions alone? What kind of husband would he be? Anakin swung his legs to the side of the bed.

"It's useless. I better face him."

Padme shrunk beneath the covers. Unsure of what might happen next. Would he storm into the bedroom? Demanding the truth of them both? She reigned her emotions in, gathered the bed sheet around her, and walked across the room. She found a gown and matching robe, then slid into it while Anakin slipped into a pair of black pajama pants.

Anakin walked across the room, then paused before the door.

"Stay here."

Padme nodded.

Anakin walked across the apartment to the front door. And with a wave of his hand, it opened. Just as he sensed, Obi Wan was on the other side.

He stared at Anakin, a look of disappointment and pain on his face as he took his padawan in... he seemed quite comfortable, standing there, half nude, shirtless in a pair of pants. There was something in his eyes that was unapologetic, as he moved aside, to let his master in.

"You could be at no loss, in knowing why I'm here."

"No, Master," Anakin replied, lips tight.

"Anakin... it has to end."

"Why?" Anakin barked.

Obi-Wan flung his hands in the accusingly. "After all I've taught you, you can honestly stand there and ask me such a question?"

"I love her."

Obi Wan sat on the sofa and hung his head. "I know, Anakin... but you took a vow. You have responsibilities... and you, must honor them. Unless of course, your wish is to be expelled. That would come as a great disappointment to many, as you are known as the chosen one."

"I love the Order, I can't leave," Anakin pleaded.

"And yet, you cannot stay. Not as long as you carry on with this affair, with Senator Amidala. This affair could ruin her life... her career as well as yours. If you love her, you will give this relationship up. I have no reason to believe Senator Amidala would cause this to happen. I knew how you felt about her. I knew because it was never a secret. But I never thought you would act on your fantasies." Obi Wan sighed.

"I've disappointed you. Haven't I, Master?"

"No, Anakin. I'm the one who failed." Obi Wan stood then walked toward the door. "You must make a choice. I sincerely hope, for all of our sakes, that you make the right one."

Anakin's eyes fell to the floor. No matter how old he was, Obi Wan always managed to make him feel like a boy.

"Yes, Master."

And with one last disappointed look, the Jedi Master was gone.

Anakin returned to bed, unable to meet Padme's eyes.

"He doesn't know that we've married. He's asked me to end it. To walk away."

"I understand," Padme said, nodding her head.

Anakin pulled her close and wrapped his body around her. He was like a warm, soothing blanket.

The ache in her heart was heavy. Lead heavy. Hours ago, she was like a bird soaring through the air, the wind beating against her wings... and now, it was as though someone had shot her out of the sky and she was in a freefall... away from the clouds, away from the heavens... away from her husband.

She wasn't mad at Obi Wan. She considered him a friend. She was grateful that he had spared her the embarrassment of Confronting her, and that, he only had their best interests at heart. But why did it have to be that way? Why was she in tug of war for Anakin? If they both could have him, it would be a win-win situation.

Best of all... It would make Anakin happy.

14. Morning

FEEDBACK: What do you think should happen next? I know where I'm going but am wondering what YOU think. Should Anakin leave the Order to be with Padme? Leave Padme? Or should he fight for both? — CG

The following morning brought a sense of dread. It's gleaming bright sunshine beamed into their window, and beckoned them to face the inevitability of separation. Not merely the daily separation their careers brought them, but a separation that meant they were never to see each other as husband and wife again.

When Anakin first proposed, she told him it wouldn't work. Their ranks, careers, and personal obligations would get in the way. The sad part, was that everything seemed to matter more than they did. But this was life. And if anyone were to survive the dangers facing the Republic, their relationship would need to fall to the wayside. *Anakin was needed.*

Anakin kissed her on the forehead then left the bed for the shower. Padme followed, somewhat numbly, and prepared herself for the day. What else did she have to look forward to but work?

When Anakin was done he collected the few belongings he owned, then walked toward the door.

"Promise me you'll eat something," Padme pleaded.

"Eat?" he said as though it was the most ridiculous thing he had ever heard. "At a time like this?"

The truth was, he was sick to his stomach. He couldn't leave Padme... there had to be another way. "I don't want it to end," he muttered.

"Nor do I, but there's nothing we can do to change it... *unless*," she added coyly... "you leave the order."

"And you can't leave the senate?" he barked.

"Whether I am still a part of the senate or not, I am still allowed to marry. But you are not. Not as long as you're a Jedi..."

Padme laid a head on his arm and pressed her head against his shoulder.

"You know I can't do that," he said.

"Then there is nothing we can do."

The secret was no longer a secret as far as Obi Wan was concerned. Lying and sneaking about didn't work. If there was any chance of being together at all, what could they do but leave their careers behind and run away? But Anakin was wholly committed to his role as

“the chosen one”. He wouldn’t leave until his work was done. Or until his remains were scattered about on the battlefield and he was dead. Padme put her face into her hands and wept.

Anakin hurried through the temple, he was late for class. One last rendezvous with Padme was worth the reprimand, which he fully expected when he saw Obi Wan in the hall. The Jedi Master faced him, eyes focused.

“I gather the situation we discussed last night has been cared for.”

“Yes, Master.”

He studied the Padawan learner, and sensed he was telling the truth. There was a Melancholy look in Anakin’s eye, for which Obi Wan was truly sorry. Someday, he decided, Anakin might have his wish when the war ends, or perhaps a bit later when the prophecy of the chosen one has been fulfilled. Whichever came first.

Obi Wan laid a hand on Anakin’s shoulder. “Thank you, Anakin. I’m proud of you.”

Anakin seemed to shirk the master’s hand away. “Thank you, Master.”

“And, please send the Senator my apologies.”

“How will I do that when I’m not supposed to see her again?” Anakin balked.

“True enough,” Obi Wan replied.

“I must go now, Master. I’m late for class.”

“Wait Anakin, there’s something I need to tell you.”

What now?

The training class has been canceled. We’re needed in the Outer Rim territories. The Republic is losing the war.”

“Losing? How can this be?”

“The Confederacy of Systems are mass producing droids at an alarming rate. We can take them, but the Clone Troopers need direction. The Council is asking the Jedi to lead the war.”

“When do we leave?” Anakin asked, his face suddenly dark. Finally, an escape! On the battle field, he didn’t have to think about his problems... he didn’t have to worry about anything but ending the war so he and Padme could be together.

“We leave before dusk,” Obi Wan answered. “We’ll meet at the landing bay.”

“Yes, Master.”

The blood in his veins raced. Just when his world had gone dark, alas! There was light at the end of the tunnel. Anakin turned on his heels and raced out of the door. He didn’t care about who saw, he was going to see Padme. He couldn’t leave without saying goodbye.

15. Destinies unknown

The rain pouring down in sheets all over Coruscant couldn't have been a good sign. *Why now?* Anakin groaned as he pulled the hood to his robe over his head and jumped out of his starfighter. Hours had passed since he'd seen Obi Wan last, and still no Padme. He tried her apartment but she wasn't there.

He tried Congress Hall, he tried Senator Bail Organa's office, even Chancellor Palpatine. He even searched the library and even the market. *Where is she?* he whined. Anakin knew she couldn't have gone far because he sensed her there on Coruscant. After circling over the capital and using his senses to dodge the bolts of lightening streaking through the sky, he hovered over the nearby Garden, and saw a lone cloaked figure sitting on a park bench, the rain pouring on her like buckets.

Padme.

She saw him walking toward her and pulled the hood from her head to confirm that it was indeed, her. They raced toward each other. Anakin pulled her into an embrace.

"I looked everywhere—" he started.

"The Chancellor told me you were being sent to fight in the Clone wars." A look of worry filled her eyes. She held tight to his robe, her face and hair wet with rain as she waited for him to answer. Her deepest fear had been realized. Anakin pulled the hood from his head and looked into her eyes.

"Don't look so sad, my love. This is good news."

Padme gave him a confused look.

"I can end the war and we can be together."

Padme pulled him close and laid her head on his wet cloak. "The war has spread to other parts of the Outer Rim territories. You can't end the war on your own Anakin. It's even worse than it was before."

He cupped her chin then leaned forward and kissed her on the lips. "I'm doing it for you. For both of us."

There was a determined gleam in his eye. Padme thought of something her great grandmother told her when she was just a little girl. She said, the worse thing a woman could ever do, was fall in love with a Jedi. For there would be no greater love than that of his to the Order.

Padme in turn, asked her how she came to know such a thing. But her grandmother's reply was simply too much to fathom. *Not now*, she told herself. The story would make her cry... for it occurred to her, never had grandmother's words been truer.

Anakin gazed at Padme, a thoughtful look on his face. "You're so beautiful," he said.

He pulled a flower from a nearby bush and pushed it into her hair which, because of the rain, fell in tendrils from the elaborate coif she had worn earlier. Padme blushed and pressed his hand to her cheek. "I thought we decided to end it."

He pressed his lips against her forehead and closed his eyes. "I couldn't even if I tried."

"But *Obi Wan*—" Padme objected.

"I don't want to hear about Obi Wan. I'll make it easier for us all and leave the Order."

"So... you won't go to fight in the Clone Wars?"

"I'll leave the Order when I come back. When the war is over."

"I won't stop you," Padme said. Not that she could anyway.

Anakin pulled Padme by the waist and drew her closer. They held each other. Streams of sunshine slowly broke through the clouds and the rain that fell in buckets upon them only moments earlier, suddenly began to dissipate. The air soon smelled of dew, which rose from the drops of rainwater that slowly permeated the leaves and grass.

Anakin held Padme's hand as they walked to the starfighter. He opened the hatched and she climbed into the passenger seat. He followed, then closed the hatch behind him.

The ship climbed to the sky, and flew to Padme's apartment, where he would leave her for a length of time unknown.

16. Body and Soul

Theirs was a love that transcended time, space, reality, and even the ugliness of cold blooded **war**. For them, what felt like the end was a new beginning. One, HE would give them through sacrifice. It was the only way they could be together.

They might have made love before he left, but there was no time and they didn't need to anyway. There were no words before he left. They didn't need that either.

He simply left her on the veranda. Had he stayed too long, he might not have left at all. They had already said all that needed to be said.

As he flew to the Jedi Temple, he recalled a conversation they had in his ship. Padme had laid her head on his shoulder. She wept, and demanded he return soon.

He was back already, he told her. All she needed to do was close her eyes. *One must see the darkness to know when there is light.*

She then demanded he return in one piece.

Already done, he answered.

Their love... was **destiny**.

To linger further, would have deepened their grief.

Anakin arrived at the Jedi Temple and was apprised of his mission. To his surprise, he wasn't to go on a mission with his Master. Instead, he was sent to Jalane, to spy on a Separatist holdout. The tour lasted several months and was spent underground with a tribe of furry creatures... the Chatatchi — a strange species with glowing green eyes and short legs.

There on Jalane, he lived as they lived, slept as they slept, ate as they ate... meals which consisted of slimy green bugs the size of a foot. Insects who gladly sacrificed themselves for the good of the ecosystem and planet. A circle of life, Chatatchi being the highest of their order. There, he remained for six long months.

At night, Anakin laid in his bunker and dreamed of Padme. Just as he had dreamed of her when he was a little boy. And when he wasn't thinking about her comforting arms, the warmth of their bed, her gentle smile, or wise words... he thought of Obi Wan. He hadn't seen him since the day he last saw Padme. The two most important people in his life — and somehow, he managed to survive. How he managed was beyond his knowledge.

But even as he thought fondly of his master, he couldn't resist the jealousy that crept into his heart. How oddly suspicious it was that Obi Wan Kenobi seemed to get all of the exciting missions while he was there, watching the Separatists, spying from a mound of dirt like a coward as they built manufacturing plants capable of mass producing droids and other weaponry that would further endanger the Republic. How many times had he begged the

Council to let him lead an attack against the plant? To let him destroy it brick by brick? *Now was not the time*, they answered. And when it was, it was not he, that invaded and destroyed the Separatists, but Obi Wan Kenobi — now GENERAL KENOBI, his Master.

With the Separatists finally out of the way on Jalane, Anakin returned to Coruscant. To brief the masters on the assignment... who had he seen on Jalane? Who were they talking to? "Rest" they told him. He was going to need it. Three days was more than enough time to recover. Never mind the fact that he hadn't seen the sun in ages... for his missions allowed him to leave bunker, but only at night. Never mind that his skin had gone deathly pale, and that his eyes had almost taken a greenish color, having spent the past few months eating the little green bugs that the Chatatchi gave him.

If there was any consolation at all, it was seeing Padme again. Though, there was little rush to get to their apartment like before. If it was one thing the mission had taught him, it was patience. Padme would not be there til much later anyway, he determined. The day would be spent with the Senate, writing bills and doing what politicians do.

He pulled his cloak to his head and entered the apartment. Threepio was there to greet him — with a clattering of noise and exuberance. More than that, the droid seemed happy to see the little Astromech, R2-D2, who had disengaged from the starfighter.

When all the happy greetings were done, the first order of business was to have Threepio send the servants away. For it was still early in the day and Anakin couldn't take the risk of anyone seeing him there. There were too many gossip mongers on Coruscant.

Threepio did as instructed, happy to be in charge of humans... for a change. "Senator Amidala has sent a message. Alien and human servants alike, must leave at once!" he said, with a clap of his hands.

When the task had been cared for, Anakin, grateful to have the apartment to himself, took a shower. *When was the last time he had one of those?* He went into the fresher and washed six months of grime and dirt from his body. When he was done, he went into the bedroom. He decided, the second order of business was a nap. And right there on top of Padme's soft blue bed, was a fresh change of clothes. Jedi Clothes. Clothes he had ever seen before.

Anakin blinked.

"Please, Master Skywalker! I believe my internal components may have defaulted to self-destruct, please do, find something to wear."

Surprised to see the stark naked Jedi out of the fresher, Threepio covered his eyes. Anakin laughed heartily at the protocol droid as he stumbled blindly out of the room, almost as quickly as he had entered.

Anakin wrapped a towel around his waist and stared at the clothes again. They didn't belong to him. The laughter he felt only moments earlier suddenly dissipated. He sat on the bed, a storm brewing in his heart, and waited for Padme.

The past few months were the loneliest months of her life. It had been a little more than a half year since her husband last held her in his arms. More than a half year since he promised

to come back in one piece. What happened? Six months, still no husband? Not even letter... or whisper that he was still alive.

He promised to come back, she thought. Anakin always kept his promises. He was only ten years old when he promised to marry her one day. And as sure as dawn, ten years later, they were husband and wife. Who was she, to be of so little faith?

She missed him. And nothing made her happy anymore. There was a time when work was all the reason she needed, to rise in the morning.

Not anymore. Not since Anakin.

The path to misery, is in the arms of Jedi, her grandmother told her.

"How do you know, nana?" Padme had asked her.

"I walked down that road once. It was a dead end," the old woman griped.

Knowing this, Padme resisted Anakin at first. But unlike her grandmother, she had no regrets. Their ending, would be a happy one. She deserved an happily ever after.

Padme walked to 500 Republica from the Senate offices at the end of the day. Another lonesome night to contend with. Another lonely night, hoping, wishing, and dreaming that Anakin would be there waiting for her.

She took the elevator to the top floor, and opened the door. Everything was the same. It was always the same. Everything in its place... meals already prepared. The apartment still dark.

Padme was in no mood to eat. She slipped out of her Senatorial robe and walked to the bedroom. Where were the droids? She wondered. Threepio was always the first to greet her. He was an unusually chatty little droid. Threepio was good company. Especially in her darkest hours, especially when she was at her loneliest.

Padme reached into the darkness. Her hand felt something warm, like flesh, where the light switch should be. But this was no light switch, it was a hand.

Then she felt another. It pulled her into an embrace. This one, was mechanical. She didn't need any light to know that it was her husband who held her. Anymore than he needed light, to find her lips in the darkness. She found herself against the wall — wanting of air, their passion — suffocating. His groin pressed against her, grinding. He whirled her around, pushed her on the bed, then collapsed on top of her — the weight of his body heavy. The weight of his mechanical arm, even heavier. His body was all muscle...

Strange, for someone so slight.

She kissed him, pulled him closer, pulled him into her... and gave him her neck, her body, and soul.

Anakin didn't care about the clothes. He didn't need them.

17. The Iron Fist

Before the suns had yet to peek over the horizon and bathe the city in gold... before it had yet to strike their window or even cast so much as a shadow... Anakin's comlink buzzed. This time, he knew better than not to answer it. Lest Master Obi-Wan were to learn he was with the Senator again. Padme stirred. Anakin answered the comlink before it could buzz again and wake her.

"Yes, Master?" Anakin said without a hint of sleepiness.

"Meet me at the docking bay. As soon as possible."

"Yes, Master," Anakin replied.

The padawan learner moved quietly, a consideration he owed his sleeping wife who was still spent from their late night activities. He pulled the covers to her neckline and kissed her on the cheek.

Soon he was out of bed and slipping into his clothes. As far as Obi Wan knew, he was a guest at a friend's countryside house. Thankfully, the Council had given him permission before Obi Wan had the chance to override their decision, as he had yet to land on Coruscant. The Master would know something the council did not: the countryside lead straight to Padme's house.

Anakin Skywalker landed on the docking bay at the top of the Jedi Temple. There, his long time Master, Obi Wan Kenobi watched, a proud look on his face. He smiled gently and laid a hand on the young man's shoulder, just above the elbow.

"I'm sorry to have bothered you so early, Anakin. But I have good news," Obi Wan said.

"News?" Anakin asked. **The war was over?**

"The Council has recommended you. You're to become a Jedi Knight."

Anakin turned and looked at Obi Wan, his eyes wide with surprise. "How..." he could barely get the words out... "could this be?"

"Your mission on Jalane as second in Command was such a success that they've decided to award you."

A look of joy washed across Anakin's face. "I-I don't know what to say..."

"All that waits is my word. I will write my pledge this evening. By tomorrow, you will be a full Jedi Knight."

"Thank you, Master. You can't know how much this means to me," he gasped. *To be acknowledged...* a voice within him whispered.

"Anakin, you will be the youngest Jedi in the history of the order. I am more proud of you than I have ever been and am grateful to have served as Master. The time has come for you to clear your own path. The path to greatness and I will stand in your way. This is part of the

ceremony Anakin, why I called you to the top of the Jedi Temple to look on the sleeping world. For you are awake, and the path of knowledge is yours to take. I only wish my master, Qui Gon Jinn were alive at the time of my ceremony. But this is not a time for grief, it is a time of celebration. Today, we become more than master and apprentice, comrades, colleagues or equals... today, *Anakin*... we become brothers."

Anakin smiled. A smile that spread like a crack across a slate of ice. Obi Wan extended a hand, which Anakin happily accepted and clutched within his own. They shook. Then suddenly, Obi Wan pulled him in. The shake had turned into a hug. He slapped Anakin on the shoulder proudly.

Anakin was stunned by the gesture. *When had Obi Wan ever hugged him?* Obi Wan had raised him with a loving, but iron fist. Anakin thought about the many times he had cried for his mother and how Obi Wan had told him to let go of his attachment and be strong. *Or was it STRENGTH? Is there a difference?* he wondered. Anakin couldn't decide. He also thought about the times he had fallen and hurt himself... how Obi Wan merely folded his arms across his massive chest, and motioned young Anakin to stand and bite pain on the nose. Not once, when there were tears did Obi Wan ever hug him the way a child deserved to be hugged. Yes, the master's fist was made of iron. And now, there was Anakin's... both literally and figuratively. And he had Obi Wan to thank.

The Jedi parted ways, and very amicably with Obi Wan promising to write his pledge. Anakin went straight to Padme's house to tell her the good news. When he arrived, he found her sitting at the table, a piece of fruit, bread, and juice before her. He raced directly to the bedroom and stripped out of his clothing.

And there it was. Again... *She hadn't even put them away.*

He left his shirt on the floor then walked to the dining room where Padme read the paper as she ate. He sat across from her and tried to catch her eye. But Padme, seemed to be engrossed in the morning paper. Or at least, tried to give the illusion of being engrossed in the paper. She was hiding something. After staring at her for a long while, waiting to be acknowledged, she looked over the top of the newspaper and smiled... the gleam of deceit in her eyes.

"Good morning, my love," she said, reaching across the table for his hand.

He took hers into his own and forced her to meet his gaze. She was nervous, but tried to hide it. His senses were more acute than her feeble attempts at deceit.

"I saw a pair of pants, a shirt, and tunic on your bed last night. What were they doing there?"

Padme looked away then pushed her chair back and stood. "Can I get you something to eat?" she offered in a cheerful nonchalant voice that didn't sound like her own.

"I'm not hungry," Anakin replied. "Whose are they!?" he repeated.

Padme stepped back and met his gaze... she swallowed and wrung her hands together nervously.

"I can't talk about it," she said, turning away.

“Whose are they?” Anakin asked, in a more menacing tone.

Padme steeled herself.

“Obi-Wan Kenobi’s,” she replied.

18. Brick by brick

Schmii's son was not a good man. He used to be. But when Schmii died and his Master Obi Wan Kenobi told him to "let go", in the place where his love for her had been there was a void. A black spot that darkened his heart... Anakin's love for Padme filled this void and made him whole again. And now that black spot threatened to become a black hole. A void so wide and so vast, that not even light could escape.

Padme would not escape.

A chrome colored durasteel hand turned into a fist. *Schmii's grieving son wanted to crush her.* And how easily he might — in the same manner that he slayed those horrible sand people. But it was years of Jedi training that held him back... the same number of years that he loved Padme.

"Wh-Wh-what do you mean?" he asked. The voice was not his own.

Padme had not yet turned to look at him. But she trembled. Her husband's anger flowed across the room to her in waves of tangible energy. That was power. Raw power — his power... and she was afraid of it.

The power got closer and he was but a breath away. His flesh hand pressed into her cheeks as he pulled her face close to his and kissed her.

"I knew you were keeping secrets from me," he said, looking into her eyes. He was so close in fact, their eyelashes touched. The black hole opened. He stared at her face, his eyes lowering to her precious deceitful little mouth. The black hole closed. "I love you too much to let him have you." So that was Obi Wan's plan to steal her from him... use the tenets of the Order to keep them apart, convince the council to send him off to war so that she's alone and vulnerable and he could have her to himself. It wasn't Padme's fault, it was Obi Wan's. *Obi wan is jealous of me,* he thought. *I have it all, I have the power, I have Padme's love, you have nothing.*

"You have me, Anakin. No one else. I'm yours," she pleaded. *Couldn't he trust her? Just this once?* He was too busy brooding.

"Trust you?" he asked, with a wry twist of his mouth. *She should be grateful she's still alive,* he thought. How the black hole wanted her...

When the love was gone and there was nothing to replace it, only darkness remained in its wake.

Padme pressed the palm of her hands onto his bare chest and gave him a pleading look. "I love only you," she said.

He felt the love, sensed it even, but didn't know what to believe. She was keeping secrets, and there was only one way to find the truth — go to the source. He was ten times more powerful than his Master, Obi Wan Kenobi. He would show him that power.

Anakin turned on his heels and strode to the bedroom. He dressed quickly then clipped his lightsaber onto his belt.

He felt Padme's presence lingering in the doorway just behind him. "Where are you going, my love? Stay here with me," she begged.

As much as Padme wanted to, she couldn't tell him the truth. The truth would bring so much trouble... but this... was just as bad.

But Anakin brushed past her. His durasteel fist knocked over a lamp as he stormed through the living room toward the veranda where his ship waited. Padme winced and hugged her arms to herself. When the danger passed she gave chase again, but he had already closed the hatch and powered up.

She ran, then stood precariously close to the edge fighting the emission from the bottom of his starfighter and the wind that blew her hair about her head. She waved and jumped as the starfighter climbed the sky to places unknown. To trouble.

Padme collapsed to the marble floor and curled into a ball. Her hand covered her face and she sobbed. The stress was too much.

Could she have told her husband, that the clothes had not belonged to Obi Wan Kenobi, but to Cobra Sien who had placed them there? That she lived under the stress of a bribe that would have ruined their lives? Would have destroyed her husband's chances with the Order? That Sien stood on that very balcony, his hand caressing her shoulder, his lips dragging along the curves of her neck as he promised to destroy them if she didn't comply?

She could tell her husband these things but what would happen? He would kill Cobra Sien. And what of his chances then? Wherever she turned, her husband seemed to be under threat. Because of her. Because he loved her and she let him.

So Padme protected him the only way she knew how. She told a lie. She maneuvered the way politicians do. But Cobra was more than she could handle at the moment because he had something she did not. **Leverage**. He had the high ground.

Cobra Sien wanted her badly. And even more than wanting her, he wanted to destroy her secret husband. Secret was the operative word — a powerful word, a tool that gave him all he needed to control her.

"Leave these clothes on your bed."

"Whose are they?" she asked.

"They belong to Obi Wan Kenobi," Sien answered.

"But-why?" she gasped.

"I want your husband to see them."

She gave him a blank stare. A curious stare. An sympathetic stare. Sien knew something she did not. That Anakin was already back on Coruscant. Padme complied because she thought she knew something Sien did not. That her husband was off fighting the war, and he would not see the clothes.

"If you tell him that I put them there, I will tell the Jedi Council about your..." he cupped her chin, a sneer on his face, "secret wedding."

"And what do you hope to gain from this?" he would never have her, she thought.

"Pleasure," he replied. He was going to destroy Anakin skywalker. Brick by brick.

19. Face and Shield

Obi Wan Kenobi sat in his room there at the Jedi Temple doing as promised and writing the pledge letter for his Padawan learner. He had become impressed by the young man, and so had the council — the same council that notoriously rejected him upon their first meeting. But even they had to admit that Anakin had not only shown himself to be a fine peacemaker, in being so patient there on Jalane, but also a fine warrior.

Emotionally, the young man also seemed to have matured — in ending his affair with Senator Amidala for the good of everyone. His sacrifice may not have seemed like much, but Obi Wan understood why it was a big deal.

Suddenly, a presence in the doorway brought him from his thoughts. The Jedi Master knew who it was before he had even turned to look at him. But there was an upset fluttering of nervousness that churched his stomach...

Anakin rocked on his heels, eyes blazing. "I need to speak to you, Master." Again, it was his Jedi training that kept the thread restraint intact.

The young man looked tired — no, angrier than he had ever seen him. Obi Wan stood, a look of worry on his face. "Sure, Anakin, what do you wish to talk about?"

"Not here," Anakin said.

"Why not here?"

"I will talk to you, but outside of the Temple, Master!" His voice rose to a shout. And his words sounded more like a demand than it did a request. Obi-Wan, who wore only his pants and shirt, slipped into his tunic. WIthout turning around, he muttered. "I'll meet you in the temple orchard — by the gazebo."

Without bothering to reply, Anakin was already on his way. Traces of the darkside were left near the door where Anakin stood. In almost what appeared to be an after thought, Obi Wan grabbed his light saber and clipped it to his belt.

Anakin was brooding again. He paced around a bollop tree in deep thought about Obi Wan's reaction to his demand to meet privately. *As though he were so innocent!* All that talk about them being brothers were lies. More lies... both he and Padme should suffer. But he would decide her fate later, depending on what Obi Wan told him.

The Jedi Master approached... a serene look on his face. He then looked around, to see if anyone was watching.

"You wanted to meet privately... is something wrong?"

"You know exactly why I asked you to come here," Anakin barked.

"Anakin..." Obi Wan said in a pleading voice. "The last I spoke with you, we parted as friends... as brothers. Not as master and apprentice. What changed?"

"You!"

"Me?"

Anakin unclipped his lightsaber and a long blue beam materialized. The placid look on the master's face turned to one of confusion. "Anakin... what's gotten to you?"

The padawan raced toward his master and hard black boot was introduced to face. Obi Wan landed flat on his rear end and skidded across the grass. He leapt to his feet and shot Anakin a look.

"You're must be possessed by the darkside— Anakin, talk to me!"

The Jedi Master ignited his light saber — and without a moment to collect himself, he saw that the young man was already charging.

"You're the one who is on the darkside!" Anakin accused.

Anakin swiped at the Jedi Master who deflected the parry with a blow of his own followed by a back hand to his face. A splattering of blood flew out of Anakin's nose.

"You really want to do this?" Obi Wan asked. He raised a hand in the air in a gesture of defeat. "Anakin, I care about you. I don't want to fight."

The padawan charged again, a series of swings attacking, forcing Obi Wan to circle a tree as he deflected the parries. Anakin swung but Obi Wan ducked. The lightsaber cut right through the bark of the tree. The ancient Temple's bollop tree fell sideways then smashed into the ground.

Enough was enough! Obi Wan decided. Anakin swung again, and Obi Wan evaded the swing, and returned one of his own. He then caught the young man by his flesh arm, jammed his foot into Anakin's leg, causing his knee to buckle. The other hand smacked him right across the face. Anakin was so stunned, that he dropped his light saber. Obi Wan jumped on top of him and locked an arm around his neck from behind giving the padawan only so much air to breathe.

"I don't know what's gotten into you, but whatever it is, there must have been a mistake."

Anakin tried to mutter something, and Obi Wan released him — just enough for him to talk. "You... you were with Padame!" he cried. A vein throbbed in Anakin's head as the mechanical arm tried to pry Obi Wan loose. The master was surprised by how strong the young man was, though not strong enough to defeat his master yet.

"How dare you, accuse me of something you were too weak to avoid! How dare you accuse me of anything untoward with the Senator. Anakin, you have been like the son I never had — a brother to me. I would never do anything to hurt you."

He rolled on top of Anakin and pressed his arm into his neck, to effort to pin him down.

"She said... the suit was yours."

"What suit?"

Anakin cried — then screamed “the blue Jedi clothes! They were yours, she said.”

“Blue...” Obi Wan muttered, loosening his grip on Anakin. “I did lose a blue Jedi tunic and pants shortly before I went to Kost. Did you ever think to ask that she somehow recovered them?”

Anakin went limp and Obi Wan set him free. “Did you ever think to ask how she came to be in possession of the clothing?” he repeated.

A tear rolled down the side of Anakin’s face. “No, master.”

“And yet, you turned against me. You destroyed a thousand year old tree. You continue to obsess over Senator Amidala... and worst of all... your anger.” Obi Wan shook his head, his voice edged with disappointment.

“I’m sorry, Master.”

How many times had he heard that before?

“You accused the council of holding you back. The only thing that has ever held you back, was not your skill — but your **anger**. Tomorrow, my recommendation to the council will be to keep you in my care. You are not ready to become a Jedi Knight.”

In fact, *he should be lucky he’ is not expelled.*

“I know, Master,” was all the padawan could say.

20. Actions and Consequences

Obi Wan had long gone when Anakin finally drew his battered self from the grass in the Temple gardens, the ancient bollop tree, Master Yoda's favorite, at his feet.

What was there to say? It was his own anger and jealousy that blinded him. It was his own anger that cost him the promotion to Jedi Knight. Obi Wan was right. All he ever did was try to make him the best he could be. He would never betray that trust in order to take Padme away just to have her for himself... *or would he?*

Doubt still lingered at the back of Anakin's mind. And what of Padme? Why would she tell him such a thing if it wasn't the truth? And how did she come to be in possession of the items anyway? Did she do these things simply to taunt him? To test his love?

Anakin walked — ran to the temple. It suddenly dawned on him that the only time he was centered and in control of his emotions was when he was out on the battlefield. And so, it was to the battlefield where he would return. There, he could swallow his love for Padme, eat his embarrassment of being so easily squashed by Master Obi Wan out in the garden... there he could think about others, and not only himself. There, he could be what he was meant to be... a Jedi.

As for Padme... well, she could have the life she longed for. She could go back to being a Senator and everything will be right again.

Anakin raced to the Room of a Thousand Fountains, where Master Yoda meditated. When he entered, the ancient man opened but one eye, and spoke... "that tree... as ancient as I, it is. Or was I shall say."

Anakin dropped to his knee and bowed his head almost reverently. "Master Yoda... I beg your forgiveness. I was arrogant. I was fool and showed no reverence for the tree or Master Obi Wan's teachings. For that, I ask that I am sent to help the Jedi resist the Separatists in the Outer Rim Sieges. I am also asking that my promotion to Jedi Knight be deferred until I have proven myself worthy of such an honor."

Master Yoda stabbed the padawan in the shoulder with his gimer stick. "Ready you are your humility shows. But honor your request I will. To Zalust you will go in the morning."

"No, Master. I will leave tonight," Anakin replied, looking up to meet Master Yoda's gaze.

"Very well," Yoda said as he climbed from his little hover disk. "To Zalust you will go tonight."

The sooner, the better, Anakin thought.

Padme couldn't sleep. In fact, she tossed and turned for most of the night, between climbing out of bed and checking the veranda with hope in her heart... that husband might be

there. She stood barefoot on the cold marble flooring her hands covering her eyes as she wept. He wasn't coming back.

Dawn broke. Padme's focused her gaze on the Jedi Temple's highest tower, still longing to see her husband's ship flying towards her in a blaze of ion fury. She stood on the veranda until blistering sunlight filled the apartment and distant skies were overrun with air traffic as civilians went about their daily business.

Threepio watched his master's wife, his brain computer whirring with confusion as he tried to determine what was wrong with her. Her eyes were leaking and had dark circles beneath them. If they continued to leak, the poor woman could dehydrate. Like people on tatooine when they went without water for too long.

Threepio approached the saddened woman with a glass of water in his hand. She refused, and he begged her to accept. With some reluctance she finally did and allowed the nagging protocol droid to sit her on the couch.

He left the room to fetch a blanket. And when he returned she was fast asleep, her legs curled beneath her.

It was several hours later when Padme woke up again. She sprang up, the first words on her lips, "Anakin—" then she remembered... he was gone and wasn't coming back.

Then suddenly a voice called out from a corner of the room.

"Looking for someone?" it said...

Padme knew that voice. A voice she met with dread and sickness in her belly. "What are you doing here?" she asked, with undisguised contempt in her voice. "You were ordered to stay away from me."

"The charges were dropped," Cobra said.

"Dropped?" Padme gasped...

Cobra laughed. "Of course, did you think the charges would stick? Chancellor Palpatine dismissed them himself."

Padme's lips formed a thin white line. "Anakin wouldn't want you here."

"You mean your secret husband? Anakin Skywalker is in the Outer Rim territories fighting the Separatists."

Padme drew the robe she wore over her gown closed, then shot the man an accusing look. "What do you what, Senator?"

"My life back."

"You ruined your reputation, not me. You were the one who behaved in a manner unbefitting a Republic Senator."

"You mean like, marrying a Jedi and keeping it a secret?"

Padme went silent.

"And you were the one who reported the incident to the Jedi Council."

"I merely defended my-my husband!" *It was Palpatine who wrote the council*, Padme thought. *The same Palpatine who dropped the charges.*

Padme turned and looked at the ship on her veranda and a cold chill ran up her spine. Cobra walked toward her and she backed away. Then in a sudden move, he grabbed her by the shoulders and tried to pull her close.

Padme struggled and fought against him. But he was too strong. Cobra jerked her toward him and pressed his lips against her own. He held her for several seconds long, his lips cold and dry as she squirmed to be free. In a desperate move to pry him away, Padme bit his bottom lip.

Cobra growled, dug his fingers into her shoulders and shook her. Padme spat in his face.

Cobra set her free and wiped the spittle from his nose and cheek with one of his gloved hands. Padme took a fighter's stance.

"Get out!" Padme ordered.

Cobra... gave her a long menacing smile. Just as he did, Threepio came trotting into the room. "Is anything wrong, my lady?" The senator sounded like she was in trouble and Threepio was going to protect her... *He was fully prepared to call security!*

"Senator Sien was ljust eaving," Padme tersely replied.

Without another word, Cobra backed his way to the veranda, then climbed into his ship.

21. A Sigh Into the Night Padme Anakin OBK

Padme stormed into Chancellor Palpatine's office unannounced, her burgundy senatorial robe flowing behind her like a flag of discontent. Two armed redrobes standing near the door tried blocking her path, but she slipped under their guard and approached the chancellor's desk. The two guards made a move to pursue, but with a raise of Palpatine's hand, they were remanded back to their posts.

"Chancellor Palpatine—"

"Yes, Senator Amidala, good to see you, dear. What can I do for you today? Please... please, have a seat," he said in a kindly voice.

Padme sat.

"Chancellor, I understand the indictment against Senator Sien has been dropped."

"Ah... now, indeed I understand your haste in coming here unannounced," he answered in a crispy voice. "Unfortunately, I had no other choice due to insufficient evidence."

"With all due respect, it wasn't your decision. It was for the courts to decide. But I understand you pardoned him of all charges. I can't help but feel..."

Palpatine waved a hand. "If I may be so bold, Senator Amidala. But, as you are aware, I am good friends with your — friend, Anakin Skywalker."

"Yes-Yes, about that—"

"Well, after reading the Council's report, I realized the situation might have reflected badly on him. I understand he is to become a full Jedi Knight... and I felt it more prudent to sweep the matter under the rug entirely. To avoid the inevitable scandal and all — you know how the gossip mongers are. I've been a victim more than once of their lies, and I couldn't have them besmirching your good name, nor that of my friend. You understand, don't you?" He gave her a kindly old smile.

"I suppose... when you put it that way."

"Good. I was hoping you would. Please accept my apologies, perhaps I might have told you what I planned to do before the charges were dropped."

Padme twisted her hands in her lap. "You meant well. I should leave."

Palpatine gave her a warm smile. "Of course, my dear. Is there anything else I might do for you?"

"No, thank you, and I apologize for the interruption. I know you are a very busy man."

"No apologies necessary."

Padme stood and walked toward the door and waited for the redguards to move their batons so that she might pass through. The warm kindly smile on Palpatine's face turned to

frost.

A shadow behind a curtain near the window mutated. Cobra Sien walked across the room, taking Padme's seat on the other side of the Chancellor's desk.

"Well done, my boy..." Palpatine said. "Your future in the senate has been solidified and your rewards will be manifold."

"Thank you, sir."

Palpatine gave him a sadistic smile. "I sense... however, you're holding something back? Have you and Senator Amidala—"

Sien blushed. "It was only a kiss. Not a particularly welcomed, kiss... she seems wholly dedicated to Skywalker."

"That will change in time," said Palpatine, coldly. "Skywalker was persistent. You will be even more persistent than he. Skywalker will be so distraught, that he will leave the Order."

"He already has, sir. This time to fight the war. What may I ask is your interest in the Jedi?"

"That is not for you to be concerned about," Palpatine said in his Sidious voice. "Leave Skywalker to me."

Desperate times called for desperate measures. And Padme was in no mood for games. Everywhere she turned, there he was... right in her face. It seemed as though he was now on every delegation, at every meeting, glowering, smirking, and worst of all... **leering**. If they passed each other at Congressional Hall, his arm would brush hers in a manner too sensual to be mistaken for anything less than an advance. His very presence, existence... unnerved her.

Padme walked into her apartment with the head of her security detail behind her.

"I want security surrounding the apartment. Typho, I fear I am deep trouble."

"I understand, my lady. I will do my best to see that you are not bothered again."

"You'll have to do more than that, Typho."

Typho's face twisted into a look of confusion. "what do you mean?"

"I want you to set a trap."

"A trap?"

"He's entered my apartment... several times without my letting him in. I want cameras installed around the unit. He's also trying to bribe me, I fear, to extort money from me."

Typho gave her a dubious look. The Senator seemed more and more paranoid these days.

"I find that rather shocking, my lady. Senator Sien comes from a wealthy family."

"And yet, a man of little political background now serves as many delegations and I do, and now holds an extremely powerful post on the Senate."

“What do you wish me to do?”

“Follow him. Give him a one way ticket back to the Outer Rim. If he’s found on video attempting to enter my apartment uninvited, we’ll have the evidence to indict him again.”

“Senator—”

Padme gave Typho a worried look. “Please...” she muttered. “I’m afraid.”

“Yes, My lady,” Typho said with a bow of his head.

“Activate the ray shield to prevent all landings on the veranda and install a security unit on ground level.”

Obi Wan Kenobi’s starfighter landed on Zalust in an abandoned war marked docking station. The Separatist had been there. And apparently so had Anakin, for there were parts scattered about the battlefield. Obi Wan Kenobi’s comlink buzzed, he answered to the voice of Ki Adi Mundi with the coordinates for their location.

“Please be brief, Master Ki Adi. If the Separtists were to zero in on our frequency...” he warned.

The two Jedi masters severed the connection. Obi Wan, after a lengthy walk through a densely wooded area, found the Jedi base. There, Anakin stood with his arms folded across his chest before a battalion of Clone Warriors. His hair had grown significantly long. So much so, that his Padawan braid could no longer be seen. A year had passed since he had been on Zalust — at least back and forth from other war torn destinations. And strangely, he avoided Coruscant altogether, even between tours. Obi Wan had heard many good things about Anakin’s work — so after his Cestus journey, he decided to stop by and see what his Padawan learner was up to.

Of course, the Jedi Master wasn’t angry about their last interaction... that awful fight in the Temple Garden. For he was not much into being a hypocrite. If he were angry, he would have had Anakin expelled, but he knew the young Jedi still grieved his mother, and felt he was better off as a Padawan... at least until he had gotten his grief under control. Besides... Anakin was not the only one who had a fight with his Master.

When Obi Wan thirteen summers, he had had a fight Qui Gonn Jinn, who took his lightsaber away and expelled him from the Order. A dispute that started when they were on a mission to save Qui Gonn’s secret love, Taly... and Obi Wan had gotten personally involved on a foreign planet in a war between the old and young. Obi Wan had sided with the young and stayed on the planet to fight against his Master’s wishes.

Anakin must have sensed his Master, for he turned, arms folded behind his back, and bowed his head reverently.

“Master? What are you doing here?”

Obi Wan laid a hand on his shoulders and gave him a pat. “I’ve come to join you. To see how you are fairing out here in the Outer Rim sieges.”

"Well... I'm doing my best, Master."

"I can see that. I've heard many good things about the role you've taken here. I hear you are quite the leader."

Anakin smiled. "I learned from the best."

"I won't disrupt your routine, I am only here to guide you on an as needed basis. For moral support... Otherwise, I am under your instruction out there on the battlefield. The zell stays in your court."

"I've not done quite so well yet."

"You're much too hard on yourself, Anakin."

"But Master, we have yet to fully seize the planet. The troops and I have managed to seize control of the east, south, and western territories. The planet will be in the control of the Republic when the western province has fallen."

"We'll make short work of it. Of that I am certain... that being said, I wanted to speak to you about a more... personal matter."

This time, Anakin's eyebrows rose and his face adopted a more solemn look. Anakin could easily predict where the conversation was headed.

"You've not yet returned to Coruscant. You can only avoid it for so long..."

"I know Master," Anakin replied. The two Jedi began a slow stroll toward a wooded area.

"Be mindful of your teachings, Anakin. The fact that you have not yet let go of the past, is the a sign of attachment. You can only prove you are free, by facing your demons and all that has become a distraction to you. And that includes Senator Amidala."

"With all due respect sir, it's been a year. It's long behind me now."

"I believe you," Obi Wan said, patting Anakin's shoulder consolingly. "But the reason you were so... *enamored* with Senator Amidala—"

Anakin waved a hand. He couldn't bare to hear Obi Wan talk to him about his mother. Obi Wan sighed.

"It's up to you, Anakin."

"Indeed it is, Master."

The two men looked around, the base far behind them. Suddenly, an explosive ripped through the bark of a nearby tree. Anakin and Obi Wan took the ground.

"I think the war on Zalust is about to end sooner than we thnk."

"I hope you mean that in good way."

"Always, Master."

Obi Wan smiled. "90 degrees, a squadron of droids."

Anakin opened his comlink and shouted orders to the troop battalions.

“Shall I?” Obi Wan said with a smirk on his face.

“After you.”

The Jedi officers rose , lightsabers brandished and commenced to deflecting blaster bolts — which ripped through the air and clipped the droids that fired their way. Then they moved forward, on the attack, rolling behind trees and ambushing the attackers.

The war on Zalust was to end soon indeed. Reinforcements were on the way, even though the Separatists were already outnumbered.

Anakin piloted an Starfighter AVTCR X back to Coruscant, with Obi Wan in the co-pilot’s seat, a bandage wrapped around his arm. He rubbed the wound, a look of amusement on his face.

“I still say it was just a fluke.”

“Admit it Master, I saved your life.”

“It was I who saved yours,” Obi Wan replied. “After all, I was just the excuse you needed to leave those destroyers that were thisclose to manhandling you.”

Anakin laughed. “Whatever you say, just remember, I’m not the one who dropped my lightsaber.”

Obi Wan groaned, his face a deep red color.

The starfighter pierced the Coruscanti atmosphere and Anakin headed right for the landing dock at the top of the Jedi Temple.

Obi Wan spoke in his comlink gaining immediate clearance to land.

The ship touched down and Obi Wan turned and looked at Anakin.

“We’ll rendevous in a few days.”

“You have no training for me, Master?”

“Anakin...” Obi Wan sighed. “You have had all the training you need. Go now, enjoy your few days off.”

Anakin smiled. “Yes, Master.”

The two Jedi parted, Obi Wan heading to the med center to have his stitches sewn, and Anakin... well, he had no place to go. He turned and looked to the east, where Padme lived at 500 Republica. A look of longing filled his eyes. He turned away, a wave of pain washing over him.

Padme left a bath of marsh flower scented water then tied her wet hair into a bun at the top of her head in the fashion of exotic dancers that entertained on Runei. She had been there recently, on a shopping expedition with hopes of making herself feel better. It had been more

than a year since she had seen or heard from the love of her life, Anakin Skywalker... there were even rumors that he was dead. A rumor dispelled by images of Anakin and Obi Wan Kenobi on Holonet. She tied the robe she wore around her waist then walked to her room where a report on the Separatists Movement awaited her. . . a list of demands. She had to be the only one in the Senate who longed for a peaceful resolution to the war, and so, made it her responsibility to at least, see if the dispute could be amicably resolved. Unlike, Chancellor Palpatine.

The doorbell rang. Padme walked through the living room, quietly ushering Threepio aside with a smile. He was in need of being recharged. She looked around, seeing that her staff had already gone for the night. The veranda was secure, with the ray shields activated. She had come to feel comfortable in her home again, as it had been many months since Cobra Sien had been dealt with.

Padme opened the door and drew her breath sharply. Anakin Skywalker stood on the other side. Tears suddenly welled in the corners of her eyes. She couldn't speak. He seemed so wisened... not the golden haired boy she knew on Tatooine so many years ago... not even the young man who left her more than a year ago. His hair was longer, his skin a shade darker... he wore a bright scar down his eye that extended over his cheek. His shoulders were broader and he seemed a bit taller than she last remembered. Even the Padawan braid he once wore in his head was gone. There was something very intense and charismatic about his presence, so much so, that she felt completely dwarfed by his energy.

Anakin's eyes were trained on her face as he searched for something — anything that would let him know that she still loved him.

Padme gasped and covered her mouth with a hand. "Anakin..." she cried.

He nodded and humbly swept her into his arms. Her feet flailed and it was as though she were floating. They moved toward the sofa. Slowly, he set her onto the floor, his hand rested against the curve of her waist.

"I wanted to give this to you," Anakin said. He gave her his braid and Padme coiled it around her hand. She was beyond words. Until, Anakin stood and walked toward the door.

"Anakin," Padme called. "Will you ever forgive me?"

Forgive her? he thought. Wasn't he the one, who assumed the worst? The one who couldn't trust the one person who meant the world to him? He was the fool. He was the one who went away because he could no longer face her.

Padme held his gaze as she awaited the answer. Anakin turned and walked toward her again, his robe in a flourish about him. He unfastened the dark cloak and draped it on the side of the sofa where she sat then took her by the hand and kissed it.

Padme wiped the moisture away then laid her palm against his cheek. Anakin trembled. For he realized he was in danger. In more danger than he had ever been out on the battlefield. He still loved Padme. He couldn't stop loving her if he tried. Every pent up emotion threatened to burst out of him all at once. His head dropped, and he barely choked the words out of his mouth.

"Padme-I, missed you so much, I thought I would die without you." He pulled her to him and kissed her hungrily.

How many times had she dreamt of this moment? *Was she dreaming now?* Padme wondered. She could feel the vibration of his lungs with every breath he took. He pressed her against the couch, clamoured over her body and ravaged her with kisses. She smelled of Marsh Flowers... her skin — so sweet. Anakin opened her robe. He found that she wore nothing beneath and gazed at her for what felt like an interminable amount of time. Padme blushed under the intense scrutiny. No one made her feel more beautiful or more desired than he.

Anakin searched through the force, traces of someone else and found nothing. And there was relief. So much so, that he hadn't moved to finish what he had started.

"Anakin, I'm cold," Padme complained. But really, she was more worried about someone — Threepio seeing them there.

Anakin pulled the robe closed, moved aside, then followed her to the bed room. He stripped as they walked, leaving a trail of clothing behind them.

In the bedroom he pulled her close to him, his nude muscular body moved behind hers as he released the string to her robe and tossed it aside. He let his lips trail the back of her neck as his hands massaged her breasts. They stumbled to the bed, Anakin beneath her. He gathered her close, as close as two people could mesh and chewed his bottom lip, moaning into the night.

22. The Lover's Pact

**Not a chapter for readers who are younger or readers who don't like graphic details
— CG**

“Only happy days for now on,” Anakin declared. He and Padme huddled closed to each other, her head parked on his chest, fingers tracing little circles on his skin. He kissed her on the forehead.

“It would be my most fervent desire, my love,” she replied.

Anakin cracked an eye open to stare down at the crown of her head. “And no more secrets.”

Padme hesitated, then slowly brought her eyes up to meet his own. “No more secrets...” her voice trailed.

The metal from his mechanical arm pinched the fine hairs on her neck as he tensed. Padme winced. *She was keeping secrets from him*, he thought. He sensed it. And she was afraid. Little chill bumps rose on her arms.

“Do you trust me, Padme?”

“With my life, my heart, and soul,” she answered, as though it was the most ridiculous question in the world. “Why would you ask such a thing?”

“Just wondering,” he replied in a flat voice.

A video surveillance camera rolled away in a nearby window.

“Is something wrong, my love?” Padme asked.

“I have a bad feeling. I feel like we’re being watched.”

Padme gave him a look of false surprise. “Watched? But... by whom? Who would do such a thing?” she had a feeling who would, but tried to bury the answer deep. She hated lying to her husband. “If you mean the security cameras... I had them installed on the veranda—”

“Why?”

Padme rolled over to lay flat on her back. She folded her arms behind her head and stared at the ceiling. “How long until they send you back to the Outer Rim?”

“I’m not sure,” he answered.

Padme rolled over again, curling her body beside him. She rubbed a hand along his flesh arm and pressed her head against his shoulder.

“Can we go to Naboo? Just you and I... at my villa where no one can bother us and we can be together and forget this awful war?”

Anakin smiled. “I have a few days off. I think it’s a wonderful idea.”

“Then what are we waiting for? We’ll leave now.”

“In the middle of the night?”

“The sooner the better,” Padme replied. She pulled out of his embrace to climb out of bed but he pulled her back. Anakin gave her a playful smile and brought his face close to hers.

“Anakin...” Padme laughed. “There’s plenty of time—”

“There’s never enough time,” he murmured against her lips. He could die out there in the Outer Rim. He wanted to make love to his wife as often as he possibly could before he went back. A mechanical hand pressed into her shoulder. She slid her arm around his neck and Anakin planted kisses beneath her chin and trailed to the curve of her shoulder. Padme laughed at the tickle of his tongue as it flickered against her breasts.

If there was a benefit to being married to a Jedi, it was the fact that he could sense her deepest pleasures and apply himself to them. Or sometimes to many places at once.

“Anakin—” she started. But was silenced with a “*Shush...*”

“Lie still...” he whispered.

“Why? What are you doing?” she asked.

Anakin laughed. “What do you think I’m doing?”

He climbed over her and let his hands roam up her legs to her waist then stared for a while... ***She's mine***, he thought with some satisfaction. ***Mine and no one else's...***

And he sat there. Hunched over. Staring. Intensely. One muscular leg on each side of her body. One mechanical arm held both of her hands over her head. She was barely visible, save for the moonlight that struck her just so... Anakin flexed the muscles of his flesh hand then focused... concentrating on his fingertips until small blue electrical currents crackled between them. Just enough, that she saw his face flickering between the charge.

The mechanical hand released her arms and Padme stretched out to reach him as he leaned down to meet her... again darkness enveloped them and disappeared as instantaneously as atoms crashing and exploding in an ion engine.

His body was taut and hard against her own. He pressed into her and Padme gasped. The energy from their bodies flowed through every cell of her body. Then suddenly, he was focused on her again, his eyes exploring the depths of own.

“Do you fear death?”

Padme exhaled as he lifted himself to his elbows. “I wouldn’t be a politician if I feared death.” How many times had she faced death? How many times had she faced death with Anakin at her side? “Why do you ask?”

He ran a mechanical hand through the tendrils of her hair, wrapping the strands around his finger. He lowered his eyes and brought his voice to a seductive whispered as he moved his lips close to hers.

"If the Order ever found out — about the two of us... they'll try to kill me."

"They're your friends, Anakin—"

She didn't know what she was talking about, Anakin thought. Sometimes he wished she kept her uninformed opinions of the Jedi to herself.

"It doesn't work that way," he whispered. "Being married to you is considered a betrayal of my oath. I would become one of the lost. There are twenty. I would become the twenty-first. They'll then decide the only recourse is my destruction and will send someone — perhaps even Obi Wan to kill me."

"Would the Jedi dispatch someone to kill the chosen one?"

"They never liked me," he said lowering his eyes. 'They fear me. They fear my power,' he continued. "But... the reason I'm telling you this is because... I wonder what will happen to you when I'm gone?"

"You make it sound as though we're doomed. Anakin, you'll retire from the Order someday and marry whomever you want. They won't have any objections—"

"But we're already married and that's against the rules. You don't understand how they work!"

"I'm sorry..."

"I don't want to kill anyone. Not Obi Wan, none of my brothers..."

Padme nodded. "What are you saying?"

Anakin positioned himself, waves of pleasure flowed through him from her body... "We should make a lover's pact."

"We already have a pact. Our wedding vows."

"Exactly. And our vows stated... *until death do us part.*"

Padme didn't like the direction the conversation was taking. "Did you mean what you said? Or were you merely reciting the vows with no feeling behind them?" he sounded bitter.

"I meant every word!" she objected.

"If the Jedi ever learned the truth about us..." Anakin held his flesh hand before her, the charges crackling between them, "All you would need to do is take my hand. And it would be over. Everything."

Padme trembled. But not in the way he wanted her to. "You're afraid," he commented, sensing her sudden dread. "But I'm not. I face death everyday. Do it Padme, take my hand."

If the Jedi killed him, she'd go on to marry another man and have children without him and then he will have died in vain. *How is that fair?* They didn't have to go to Naboo. They

could leave the world behind them, this awful war, the Jedi, the Senate. Then it would be over. All of it. Though not for the trillions of beings still under the threat of the Separatists.

Padme gazed at Anakin, a look of paralyzed fear in her eyes. *Was he insane?*

“I’m crazy,” he answered, reading her thoughts. “I’m crazy for you.”

“But, if I were to take your hand into my own...”

“The charge would course through you, and from you back to me and kill us both.”

She couldn’t believe he was saying this to her. “But if I were to do it now, someone... perhaps even Obi Wan might find us here. Like this.”

Anakin groaned. *Why did she always have to bring him up?*

“I don’t think you should wish Obi Wan to find you in my bed,” Padme continued.

The charge between Anakin’s fingers dissipated.

“Do you agree or not? If the Jedi ever learned our secret, we’ll have no choice but to execute our lover’s pact. Do you love me at all?”

“Of course I do.” Padme pulled him close.

“I would die for you, Padme.”

And that was a truth that couldn’t be denied.

“Fine. If that is your wish, then I will follow. Hopefully that should never be the case.”

Anakin smiled. “Very well then.”

Anakin walked into Padme’s Naboo villa and set their suitcases on the mosaic floor. He looked around... at the pictures on the wall that moved like images on a holonet screen. Pictures of Padme’s family... the in-laws he would never meet. At least, for the time being.

Padme raced into the room, a look of excitement on her face then grabbed Anakin by the hand and pulled him out onto the balcony.

“Isn’t it beautiful, Ani?”

He looked out and saw nothing but a field of wild overgrown grass. The villa had been neglected since Padme took permanent residence on Coruscant. Not even servants remained.

“I should love if we could be here all the time. The place where we fell in love!” Padme caressed his face. “Take a walk with me,” she demanded.

Anakin grimaced then followed her lead. They took an overgrown path to the field where lush waterfalls fell near the lake. Anakin slipped an arm under her leg and swung Padme around. There was a light in her eyes that he hadn’t seen in a long time. Her joy was contagious, making him as happy as she.

Suddenly he tripped over a log and both went crashing into the ground below in a fit of laughter. Padme pulled a stalk of grass and twirled it between her fingers before tucking it

into Anakin's hair. He clamoured over her, like a boy in a wrestling match.

"Behold, the mysterious powers of the force," he said, a fire in his eyes. Anakin stuck his flesh hand into the dirt beside her head and a small marsh flower began to sprout and bloom right before her eyes.

"Ani..." Padme said, suddenly weepy.

He leaned forth and kissed her on the mouth. From afar, they looked like two animals, hiding in tall stalks of grass. There, on Naboo, all their troubles, all their sorrows seemed worlds away. There was only the two of them and their love.

23. Let's talk

Anakin and Padme Naberrie Skywalker did as much as they could possibly do in the time they spent on Naboo. The first day was spent frolicking near the lake by Padme's villa. The second was spent doing idle things, like eating breakfast in bed and sleeping. The third day, Padme suggested they go to the opera...

Anakin watched with a frown on his face as she stood before a mirror clipping an earring into her ear. It wasn't that he hated the opera, or didn't want to go with her... it was that he was forced to go in disguise, and in doing so, he couldn't fully enjoy time out with his wife.

Padme bent her neck allowing Anakin to fasten a necklace around it. When she was done she turned and adjusted Anakin's robe, mumbling quietly to herself. They soon left the house, their hands clasped together as they walked. Anakin wore his hood and kept his face down whenever they were in full view of the public. Padme being the former queen didn't help matters any, and soon they couldn't hold hands at all. Senators, colleagues, and even some Jedi where there on the planet. Padme could only explain her husband away, claiming that he was overseeing her security detail. Nevermind, her entire security team was on Coruscant since she and Anakin had left alone, taking only Threepio and Artoo with them. On the plus side of things, they did manage to steal a kiss or two when the lights in the theatre dimmed and all were seemingly distracted by the performance before them.

The night ended when Anakin's comlink rang. Obi Wan was on the other end. Tomorrow, he would go back to Coruscant and both would leave for a tour in the Outer Rim. For how long, they couldn't be certain.

That night, Anakin and Padme laid in bed, whispering and simply doing their best to enjoy whatever time they might have left to spend together.

"You never told me why the council decided you were ready to become a knight."

Anakin lowered his eyes, grinning. "Well... I was sent to Praestlyn and apparently news reached council about my activities there..."

"That wasn't the only news that reached Coruscant. There were rumors that you died in an explosion. I was so sad, Anakin, waiting to hear from you. But I knew you were still alive. Somehow, I still felt as though you were."

"What about my letters? You never wrote back," he replied, somewhat solemnly.

Padme gave him a confused look. "I never got them," she replied. "Is that why you didn't come back?"

"I was certain our marriage was over. As much as I didn't want it to be... as much as it nearly killed me."

"Oh Ani..." Padme said, wrapping her arms around him. "Strange that I didn't get the letters. Where did you send them?"

“To your office. I didn’t want to draw suspicion.”

Padme clapped a hand across her face. “No no no! Anakin...” she droned. ‘I do hope they weren’t ‘detained’ by the Chancellor. I understand that his office now oversees all incoming and outgoing mail. The ‘hunt’ for spies and corrupt senators.’

“I’m sure the Chancellor means well.”

“You only say that because he’s your friend.”

“Don’t talk like that, Padme. You may not trust him, but I do.”

“More than you trust me?”

Yes, he wanted to answer... but thought better of it.

“There are things I can tell the chancellor that I can’t tell you.”

Padme brought her voice to a whisper... “You told me about the sand people and I forgave you, I understood...”

“That was different,” Anakin said, climbing out of bed.

“Where are you going?” Padme asked.

“Back to Coruscant.”

Padme was out of bed behind him in an instant. She caught him by the back of his pants and pulled him toward her. His resistance was minimal.

Padme clung to his arm, meeting his glare with a comforting smile. “Remember what you told me a few nights ago?”

Anakin drew his breath.

“...about, making love as much as you possibly can because of the slight chance that you might not return? Would you want harsh words to be the last that passed between us.”

Anakin pulled her into an embrace. “Of course not... I just—I don’t want to talk about what happened to my mother again. Or about the sand people.”

Padme rubbed his arm. “I won’t speak of it ever again,” she said. “Now please, Ani... come back to bed.”

The following day, as planned, Anakin met Obi Wan Kenobi at the top of the Jedi Temple, on the docking bay. The Jedi Master watched as Anakin strode toward him, his cape billowing in the wind. There seemed to be a noticeable jump in his step... apparently, he had been to see Senator Amidala again, Obi Wan thought with a wry twist of his mouth.

“There’s trouble in the Outer Rim. A few Jedi have engaged General Grievous, and all but one lost their lives.”

“That shouldn’t be a problem,” Anakin said with needed confidence. “We’ll dismantle him piece by piece, Master. And that will be the end of Grievous and the war. We can only hope

Count Dooku is with him. Perhaps we'll end him too."

Obi Wan sighed. "Go in with an open mind, Anakin. Overconfidence can be a weakness."

Always with the lessons... Anakin thought. "Of course, Master."

Obi Wan opened the hatch to his starfighter and climbed inside, as did Anakin in his. The two ships rose to the sky, and in a blink, they were gone.

Meanwhile, on the other side of Coruscant, Padme was already at her apartment sifting through packages that had come in. Suddenly, she paused... There was one particular arrival of what appeared to be video footage on a small microdisk. Her stomach sank. Somehow, she had a bad feeling about it. There was no reply address.

Padme walked across the room and slipped the microdisk into the holoview. She sat on the sofa and watched as a dimly lit stranger approached her apartment... the stranger who after a few moments, appeared to be her husband. She clapped a hand over her mouth, a tiny whimper escaping her lips. The footage rolled to Padme and Anakin on the veranda in an embrace... then later, to Padme and Anakin in bed.

Padme's heart began to race. Video clip after video clip of the two of them together. Padme leapt out of her seat and raced to the box the video footage arrived in. There was a small handwritten note:

"Let's talk, — Cobra", it said.

24. Professional Liar

Three days he told her. To meet him at the Congressional Banquet and to sit at his table for what he called “negotiations”. The Congressional Banquet wasn’t so bad. Others would be there. Nearly all of their peers, members of the Holonet press, as well as the Chancellor. There was nothing to be afraid of. Nothing at all, she told herself. If she could face two monstrous beasts in the arena on Geonosis, then she could stand up to a Senator from the forest planet of Endor.

The Congressional Banquet was a bi-yearly event where various keynote speakers made speeches about the state of the Republic. It was also a time for announcements of both personal and politically relevant topics. These topics were made by the Senators themselves, or their aids. Sometimes the announcements were about various changes being made to their home planets and abroad. Padme wondered if Cobra Sien chose the Congressional Banquet to make an announcement of his own... one that had nothing to do with him, but everything to do with Padme and Anakin Skywalker. The very thought made her shudder. She could see the Holonet press typing away in their datapads and reporting the scandal to holonet news to be spread throughout the galaxy within a matter of minutes — the following day, their story would be all over the holonews paper in the social and gossip pages.

Cobra’s table was next to the speaker’s podium. There were flowers and two lit candles before him and glasses of wine. He rose when Padme approached, and pulled her chair. She reluctantly sat beside him. Cobra looked around, to see if anyone was looking then grabbed the seat of her chair and pulled her closer. Padme cringed, her nose crinkling as though the man emitted a foul odor.

A senator from Rea stood behind the podium speaking passionately about conservation issues and the need of funding for his planet.

Padme’s lips formed a thin white line as her eyes rose to meet Cobra’s face. “You wanted to speak with me about a very private matter, Senator. A matter that should be of no concern to you.”

Cobra’s smile was one of pure malevolence. “A Senator who violates the rules should be everyone’s concern.”

“Did you ask me to come here because you wanted to torment me? If you want to tell everyone, then go ahead and do it. I have no wish to be trifled with. The situation is difficult enough.”

Cobra shook his head. “On the contrary, I wish to discuss a political matter.”

Padme’s eyebrows rose. She could deal with this. She could “do” politics. “Then what is it that you wish to discuss?”

“I would like your support on a bill. I plan to submit it to the senate in only a matter of weeks. You’re renown for being the ‘peace’ senator... and I am aware that all war bills that have been thus rejected on the floor were ferociously contested by you and those who follow

your lead. You are all that stand in the way of my bill and I am hoping the two of us can work something out.”

“And what does the bill entail?”

“My father’s company — **my** company, Endor Enterprises is requesting a no bid contract to build more weaponry. Our all terrain machines will lead the Republic to certain victory.”

“And more wealth for your family, no doubt. Untold wealth...” she whispered incredulously. “So that’s what this is about... money? And what about peace? What about a peaceful resolution to the war? Surely the Separatists will only build more weapons to fight you.”

“More weapons, more money for me,” he answered, taking another sip of his wine.

Padme folded her hands across her lap. “No. I won’t do it.”

“You know why so many Holonet reporters are here tonight? Because I asked them to come.”

Cobra grinned, then lowered his voice to nearly a whisper.

“Your Jedi husband is a very famous man. His many adventures and mishaps along with the Jedi Master Obi Wan Kenobi are well known. He’s in the news almost nightly. He’s also the face of the Republic and the war against the Separatists. People love him. Imagine their dismay... their disappointment seeing him in such *compromising*... positions with you, Senator. Imagine how this scandal will obliterate your hardwon reputation.”

Padme’s shoulders slumped in exasperation and her eyes dropped. Her misery was lost on the crowd behind her as they laughed at the humorous speech of a speaker who had taken the stage. Lost on all but Chancellor Palpatine who did his best to hear them.

“A scandal is nothing compared to the misery expanding the war will bring to the Republic or the many civilians who might die because of your greed.”

The speaker left the podium to sit at a nearby table. A table among hundreds that sat thousands of senators.

“Either way, I win. When the scandal breaks, you’ll be out of the Senate. I’ll have no one to oppose me. Either stand down or suffer the consequences.”

Padme gave a defiant shake of her head.

“Very well then.”

Cobra stood. A bright light from an overhead strobe shone on their table. Padme blinked, suddenly blinded by its bright lights.

“Good evening colleagues, members of the press... and friends. Tonight I stand before you with a very important announcement to make.”

And then it struck her. Everything Cobra said was true if not worse than he dared to state. The disappointment her relationship would bring to trillions of people who admired and trusted Anakin and Obi Wan Kenobi to end the war would be even more devastating than she could possibly fathom —. The scandal would be a mental victory for the Separatists who

would cite it as a mark of corruption in the Republic and the Jedi Order. Not to mention the disappointment her relationship with Anakin would cause the Council and Obi Wan Kenobi himself.

Suddenly Padme was on her feet, her hand on Cobra's arm. "Please don't..." she whispered, eyes low.

Cobra's eyes stayed focused on the crowded room. "Tonight, I wish to announce... that Senator Padme Naberrie Amidala and I are to be married."

A collective gasp rose around the room. Then sudden applause. Padme's mouth nearly dropped to the floor. How could he?!

Cobra took her hand and raised it before the crowd, parading her before thousands of colleagues, and possibly the several trillions watching them on Holonet. She swallowed nervously.

Please... please don't let my husband find out... Padme thought.

Cobra smirked, slipped an arm around her waist and pulled her to him. "We will make an announcement detailing the date of our wedding... the most lavish wedding in the history of the Republic!" He added in a thunderous voice.

...Lavish enough to get the attention of one Anakin Skywalker. Cobra threw his head back and laughed.

The grip on Padme's hand was iron as Cobra led her through throngs of Senators, civilians and press alike, all with questions about the pending nuptials.

What nuptials? she thought.

Cobra was a professional liar. How easily he led everyone to believe they were a couple and about to be married no less! All with a smile across his lying face. Despite this, all Padme could do was think of Anakin.

When she and Cobra were finally out of earshot, she turned to him, her nails digging into the flesh of his hand.

"Engaged! How could you do this?" she hissed.

Cobra feigned a smile. "I wonder what Skywalker will think..." he droned. Then getting close to her face, he whispered, "A shame my bride is already ruined."

The digging of Padme's nails intensified, as did Cobra's grip on her hand. The couple turned to find Chancellor Palpatine upon them, face smiling.

"Senator Amidala... I hear congratulations are in order." Palpatine grinned like a kindly old uncle.

There was an unmistakably squeamish look on Padme's face. "Thank you, Chancellor," she stuttered. "I'm sorry but I was just leaving... Perhaps we might talk about this another time?"

“So soon? We hardly had time to discuss your wedding,” he replied, in a disappointed voice. “Are there plans to marry on Naboo? Or should we expect the festivities to take place here on Coruscant?” Palpatine smiled again. He was enjoying this.

Padme shot Cobra an helpless but angry look.

“Here on Coruscant, of course,” Cobra replied. “The Jedi Temple is here. I’m hoping the Jedi will honor us by performing the wedding ceremony. Perhaps I might submit a request.”

Palpatine gave Padme a warm smile. “Of course! What a splendid idea. In fact, Senator Amidala is great friends with several of the Jedi... you’re particularly close to Anakin Skywalker, are you not? Perhaps he might perform the ceremony for you?”

Padme’s vision blurred with unwashed tears and suddenly, she felt awful close to fainting. “Yes, I-I’ll have to... go now. Goodnight, Chancellor,” she replied in a stoic voice.

Padme raced to the nearest exit. “*What am I going to do?*” she cried.

25. Industrial Strength Lies

A messy pile of dismantled battle droids laid in an alley just behind a run down cantina on the Outer Rim planet of Cristea. Anakin Skywalker and Obi Wan Kenobi deactivated their lightsabers and clipped them to their belts, almost in unison. Two Jedi, then pulled the hood to their robes over their heads and slipped into the crowded market, unnoticed by the Separatist Neimodian group they were spying upon.

Anakin stopped near a fruit stand, grabbed a pumpkin fruit and tossed the vendor a credit. Obi Wan gave him a slight nod of his head, and both walked to the catina, going inside.

The Jedi pair did their best not to look like Jedi. In fact, one could say they looked like tall sand people, with their hoods covering their heads, eyes, and obscuring their faces. They sat on neighboring bar stools and Obi Wan laid a handful of credits on the counter.

“Savages are not welcome here,” the bartender barked, sliding the credits back to Obi Wan.

Obi Wan using a trance-like voice began to speak: “We are paying customers and you want to serve us.”

“You are paying customers and I would like to serve you drinks.”

“What do you wish to have?” Obi Wan said.

“What do you wish to have?” the bartender repeated in a trance-like voice.

“My friend and I will have a shot of rum.”

“Yes sir,” the bartender replied, hurrying to fetch their drinks.

“It’ll only be a matter of time before someone sees the pile of droids in the back, and put two and two together that there are Jedi here.”

“We’ll have all the information we need long before then,” Obi Wan replied.

The bartender passed the pair their shots of rum. Obi Wan tossed his head and drank it in one gulp. He raised his hand for another. The bartender complied, pouring the rum directly into his glass.

“The arena will be airing in a few minutes,” the bartender said in a gruff voice.

“What do you mean?” Anakin asked.

“It’s sports night. Can’t you read basic?” the guy said, pointing toward the sign on the window.

“We’re savages, remember? We can’t read anything.”

Obi Wan smirked and gave Anakin a nudge to the side with his elbow. They were alike in more ways than he cared to admit. Obi Wan could remember being somewhat of a smart ass when he was that age. If not, a bit worse than Anakin. He could easily remember calling the

boy a “pathetic lifeform” when Qui Gon Jinn bought Anakin to their ship that day on Tatooine so many years ago.

Obi Wan tossed his head back and drank the second glass of rum in one gulp. Anakin raised his hand, singling the bartender for more drinks.

“Master... I think we ought to take it easy with the rum...”

“Don’t worry Anakin,” he said, pulling the hood to his robe back. “We’re just trying to fit in...” he said, one brow raised.

“Master— your hood...”

“Don’t worry about it, Anakin. I doubt any Neiomodians will come in here.”

He drained the remnants of his third glass. Anakin swirled the contents around in his own. He then turned and looked around. The room swarmed with various life forms. some stumbled about in a drunken stupor, some punched each other, or played cards.

“Mind your liquor master, we’re in polite company.”

Obi Wan flagged the bartender again. “How about a bit of Hoi Broth, brother?” Obi Wan said.

Anakin sighed. *Not again...* he thought. “Master, remember what happened the last time you drank hoi broth?”

“Nothing I can’t handle, Anakin.”

The bartender slid the drink across the bar, which Obi Wan grabbed almost on instinct.

“Master, but you had a really bad—”

Obi Wan threw his head back and gulped it down.

“See? Nothing could possibly go wrong.”

His hood was fully off of his head now and his speech was slurred. When was the last time the master had eaten anything? If there was one vice, rum was it. Rum made him do and say foolish things, and now was no exception.

“Anakin...” Obi Wan droned. “You’re not the only one...” he started.

Anakin turned and looked at the Jedi Master. “The only one who what?”

“The only one who... who... whose...(burp!) got problems, if you know what I mean...” he wiggled his eyebrows and Anakin tried to suppress a smirk. *At least he’s amusing*, he thought.

“What kind of problems?” Anakin asked. One of Obi Wan’s eyes began to swell, sealing it closed. Anakin stared at his face. Big red splotches spread across his cheeks.

“Well...” he replied in his Coruscanti accent. “You’re not the only one who’s loved someone... or shall I say, **loves** someone...”

Anakin’s head dropped, his eyes focusing on the contents of his glass again. “You mean Siri Tachi, don’t you?” *Surprise surprise master, I already know!* Anakin thought.

Obi Wan smiled bitterly and shook his head. "Somewhere across the galaxy... not too far from Coruscant..." he drawled, pointing his finger drunkenly, "On Runei there's is the sweetest piece of a—"

"Master!" Anakin interrupted, glad to have stopped him from finishing the sentence. "Your other eye..."

"I don't need eyes to see. I'll use the *force!*" he slurred, slipping off of the barstool into Anakin's waiting arms.

The apprentice sighed. *The drunken father he never had...*

"Master... your eyes... we have to get you out of here."

Anakin pulled the hood he wore off of his head. "I think our cover is blown. It's only a matter of time before the Separatists learn we're here. We don't want to compromise the mission, Master..."

Anakin draped one of Obi Wan's arms over his shoulder and dragged him toward the door. "You'll be alright Anakin... Just because Senator Amidala is engaged, doesn't mean the two of you can't be friends."

He made a circle gesture with his index finger. "If you know what I mean..." two swollen eyebrows tried to wriggle. This time, it wasn't as funny.

"What did you say?" Anakin held Obi Wan under one of his arms, glaring.

"I don't remember," Obi Wan replied. "I think the separatists are coming." He dropped to a knee and Anakin pulled him up.

"No, Master. What did you say about Padme?"

"Ah, that... apparently Senator Sien proposed and Padme accepted."

Anakin was suddenly out of breath. Was it the booze talking? "That can't be right."

Obi Wan grabbed Anakin by the collar, nearly pulling him down as his pulled himself to his feet, arm slung around the apprentice's neck. "Oh everyone knows, Anakin. IT's been all over the holonet. You must pay attention to politics. Be mindful of your surroundings... be mindful... be mindful... of everything... oh, and Separatists are coming."

The Jedi master slumped to the ground, and suddenly a squadron of droids clamored into the doorway and opened fire. Anakin's lightsaber was out and he was deflecting bolts and slashing droids without the help of his master. Not that he needed him anyway... still, he wonder, if what Obi Wan told him was true. How could Padme be engaged when they're already married? He needed to get back to Coruscant, and fast.

Obi Wan's allergic reaction was just the excuse he needed to get back to Coruscant. He left him in the med center at the Jedi Temple, an open gash on his forehead. In the middle of the battle with the droids, Obi Wan stood and yelled something about the force guiding him, took a swing at one of the destroyers then slipped and hit his head.

"That's four," Anakin said, looking over his Master.

"Four?" Obi Wan droggily replied.

"The fourth time I had to save your life."

Obi Wan grimaced. "Sorry... about the whole thing, Anakin. I didn't do or say anything too stupid did I? Besides, getting this bump on the noggin?"

"No, of course not, Master. You were a perfect gentleman. Your eyes will open in no time." Anakin tried to hide the smile in his voice.

"Thank you, Anakin. You better run along and brief the council."

"Already done. I told them someone spiked your water with hoi broth. Nothing more."

"I have nothing to hide Anakin, I did nothing wrong."

"Right. Of course, Master. Anyway, I have to go now, I have some errands to run."

"Anakin... what about the Separatists?"

"Our cover is blown. I had no choice but to end the intelligence operation. Cody and the clone unit have already swept the planet."

"Excellent, well done." Obi wan turned his head, and fell into a sudden, almost hybernated-like sleep.

Anakin was off, the smile gone from his lips and from his eyes. He figured what Obi Wan told him had to be a mistake. But it was better to go to the source anyway. There were rumors abound on Coruscant that Padme Amidala was to marry. The pain was like a knife to his heart.

He made it to Padme's apartment but didn't land on the veranda. The ray shields had been activated. He wondered if she did it to keep him out. He took the elevator to her floor, and busted the door in.

He found Padme, sitting on the sofa, sewing a pillow. She rose when he entered, a look of unfiltered joy on her face. She raced to him and wrapped her arms around his neck.

"Oh Anakin, I'm so happy to see you."

Two strong hands reached to his neck and pried her hands away. He stared at her... a storm clouding his eyes. Padme pulled her wrists from his grasp and shrank away from Anakin.

He raised a hand, touching her collar then pulled her toward him again, very gently. Jealously burned within him like a wick in a candle . She was keeping secrets again.

"So..." he said, tracing a line along her neck. "I missed you."

"Anakin," she gasped. "I missed you so much, I was so worried about you these past few months."

"Really?" he asked. "Worried I would find out?"

"—what?"

"Find out," he repeated. "About your engagement?"

Padme turned, unable to meet his gaze. "How can I be engaged when I'm married to you?"

"I was hoping you would tell me." He bit his anger down.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

Anakin grabbed her by the arm and whirled her around. "Palpatine told me you were the one who asked him to drop the charges against Cobra Sien!"

"That's not true!" Padme cried. *How could the chancellor say such a thing?* Perhaps he misunderstood, she surmised.

"I'm tired of the lies, Padme. I loved you... I loved you for as long as I could remember, but I didn't know it would be like this."

Padme threw herself in his arms and met his eyes with a pleading look in her own. "It's not true."

"Palpatine never lied to me. I can't honestly say the same about you."

"I was only trying to protect you," Padme said in a small voice.

Anakin held her by the shoulders, and shook. "Does he hold you? Does he kiss you?"

"*No-I swear!*"

"*Then why did you lie to me!!!*" Anakin set her loose then stalked across the room. He smashed his hand into a wall, deactivating the ray shield and walked out onto the veranda. Padme stood near the sofa, shaking and rubbing her arms.

"Did you put this here to keep me out?"

Tears spilled from Padme's eyes and her lips trembled. "Anakin... please, I would *never*." She walked to the veranda, and stood at a safe distance as his gaze swept across the horizon, toward the setting sun.

"Please, Anakin... it's daylight still. Someone will see you."

"You mean, your fiancee will see me. Right?"

He turned and stalked toward her again and pulled her into his arms. His chin rested against her forehead. He held her tight, and a tear escaped the corner of his eye. "You're mine, he can't have you." She felt small in his arms. He could crush her, and neither of them would have her.

"I wanted to tell the truth for so long, but I knew if you found out... you might do something and ruin your chance to become a Jedi."

"I don't care about the Jedi! Padme, without you, being a Jedi means nothing. You are everything to me. Tell me the truth!"

Padme began to sob, her shoulders heaving. "It's been so stressful—"

"You think fighting day in and day out isn't stressful to me? I've been faithful to you the whole time, I don't care how many women have... tried to entice me. **Did he touch you?**"

"No, please," she said, biting her sob down. "He kissed me... but only once—"

Anakin's voice dropped two octaves and his eyes went dead cold. "You let him kiss you?"

Padme froze... "I didn't want him to..." she said.

Anakin pushed her aside and stumbled into the apartment.

"Please don't leave... I fought him, Ani. I fought him as hard as I fought in that arena on Geonosis. Threepio was here, he helped me."

Anakin turned, his eyes were blood red. "Why did you lie about it?"

"I told you, I wanted to protect you. I didn't want you to do something crazy. He's blackmailing us. He told me, if I didn't sign his war bill, he would tell the Senate and the council about our marriage. Then he told everyone at the Congressional Banquet that we were engaged."

Padme walked across the room and laid a consoling hand on Anakin's back. He looked down, almost ashamed of himself. He pulled her toward him again.

"Then you know what I must do..."

"Anakin, please don't. If anything happens to him—"

"So you're defending him now?" Anakin was glaring again. Padme rubbed his arm.

"No, I'm defending you. I'm taking care of you, just as I always have. Anakin... there are so many things I do to make sure that we can be together. I've reorganized my life, I've lied to my friends and family. I do it because I love you."

Anakin's shoulders dropped, and he was sulking. Padme pushed her finger beneath his chin and lifted his head.

"He can't have you," Anakin mumbled.

Padme shook her head, "I love only you," she said, in a soothing voice.

He looked up again, but only briefly, then mumbled, "these are my lips," then bent his head to her and kissed her.

26. Moral Truths

I get a lot of reads on this story. More than I do reviews coming in. I would love to know who all of my readers are, if you can review or comment, please do. And always, thanks for reading — CG!

In bed, he had gathered her to himself and draped his arm over body so that she couldn't so much as move without him knowing. She felt... *smothered*. Padme sighed. How was it, that she... of all people, could love someone so volatile and possessive? She had to know it was coming. The way he looked at her on Naboo, the way he talked to her, the way he cherished her and hung on her every word. He made her feel things she had never felt before. Perhaps, somewhere deep within herself she wanted to know what it was like to be loved as deeply as he loved her. When others looked at her and saw Senator Amidala, Anakin saw a beautiful, intelligent woman. He didn't care about the rules, he didn't care about the boundaries that should have been in place between them. He wanted to be with her and that was all that mattered to him.

Of all the Jedi she ever met, he was the only one who ever made his feelings plain. After that incident with the sand people, she knew he needed her. He knew he needed her as well. After all, did she not take care of him when he left Tatooine all those years ago? Was it not she, who made sure he was alright? Did she not hug him when he was sad? Did she not comfort him? But her feelings for him at the time were maternal... she had no idea the little boy would grow up and repay her kindness and affection by asking her to marry him. Or that, when the boy looked at her, he thought of her in *that* way.

She was the soothing balance to Obi Wan's iron discipline. The comforting balance to his nightmares and the sting of Watto's whip. She made him whole and complete. But still... Anakin was afraid of losing her, the way he lost everything else... and sometimes the fear that he could lose her made him volatile and angry. Padme thought more and more of leaving the Senate altogether to devote her time to her husband. To show him, that he was more important to her than politics, more important to her than anything or anyone else. The stress of the war was beginning to take its toll and her Ani was turning into a different person right before her eyes.

Padme laid a hand on his shoulder and shook him awake. Anakin opened his eyes and rubbed a hand across his face as if to fully wake himself. "You're going to smother me," she said.

"I'm sorry, my love. I wasn't trying to hurt you."

He was her Ani again.

"There's something I wish to ask you."

Anakin sat up, propping his head on one hand. She too, propped herself up in the same manner, then inched closer to his bare chest. “Should I leave the Senate?”

Anakin smiled. “Are you serious?”

“Yes.” *Dead serious.*

His voice took a darker tone: “Because of Cobra?”

Padme shook her head, “No, because of you.”

Anakin looked down at her. “As much as I would like you to leave the senate, I couldn’t ask you to do that. This is what you love to do Padme, I could never ask you to stop doing what you love, no more than you could ask me.”

“You mean that, Ani?”

“Of course I do,” he smiled. “I know, I’m a fool sometimes, but only because I love you so much, Padme I don’t know what I’d do if I ever lost you. It would probably drive me mad.”

“You have control these... urges. I can only reign you in for so long. Ani, sometimes, I’m afraid of you.”

“Of me? — I could never hurt you Padme. Not in a trillion years.”

“That’s not what you told me before.” *That’s not what you did before,* Padme wanted to say, thinking of the few times he had grabbed her just a bit too roughly.

“You mean the lover’s pact?” he smacked his lips. “That’s different.”

“How is it different?” she asked, genuinely curious.

“Different because it’s an agreement between you and I. It’s not something I would ever force, should you wish to back down.” *He wanted to believe this, he really did.* Anakin pulled her close. “You know what I’m thinking about?”

She had an idea.

He nibbled her shoulder and pulled her beneath him. Padme sighed as she turned away from his kisses. “Anakin, no. It’s almost dawn and I have a meeting in a few hours.” *Their love making usually lasted a few hours.*

He wedged himself between her thighs, resting his heavy body on top of hers. “It won’t take long,” he pleaded, showering her face with more kisses.

“You know how tired it will make me,” she griped. Hadn’t they already made love tonight? He was younger and had the energy. That on top of having the tenacity of a Jedi.

“I know,” he mumbled, his lips against her hair as a hand slipped to her inner thighs. “It’s just that, I won’t be here much longer than a day. I have a trip to make, and if Obi Wan is better we’re going back to the Outer Rim. I might not have a chance to say goodbye.”

Padme had already resigned to the sensation of his hands, her eyes closed as he kissed her again. Anakin shuddered as he pressed into her. *Her breathing and sighing deepened.* “*You feel so good, Padme,*” he muttered.

She pretended not to hear him as the strength of his body stroked against her. Anakin thought himself so lucky to have Padme... then suddenly, a disturbing thought entered his head. *For how long would he get to have her?* He thought of Cobra and nearly lost his momentum. That trip to Endor couldn't come sooner...

Padme is mine. He can't have her. He was brooding again. Anakin ceased in his lovemaking to stop and look at her face.

"Is something wrong?" she asked.

He rolled over to stare at the ceiling, prying their sticky legs apart. Padme crawled to lay on top of him, but he flipped her over, assuming his previous position. He caressed her face. The soft look in her eyes was a sudden comfort to him. "Nothing. I love you," he said. He pressed himself into her again, laying his sleepy head beside hers on their pillow, thinking not of Cobra, but of the moment, and their love.

27. I'll tell you later

I get a lot of reads on this story. More than I do reviews coming in. I would love to know who all of my readers are, if you can review or comment, please do. And always, thanks for reading — CG!

Cobra Sien sat behind a desk in his spacious gold and black colored Coruscant office. Behind him was a magnificent view of the city, and directly across only a few blocks away, was the balcony to Padme Amidala's apartment. Over the past year he had watched, and even video taped the comings and goings of her secret husband, Anakin Skywalker. It was only a matter of time before he got rid of the Jedi for good. Unbeknownst to Chancellor Palpatine, Cobra was plotting to have Anakin assassinated with hopes that Padme Amidala would turn to him in her grief. He didn't care about the Chancellor or his wishes. His no-bid contract was as good as approved already. Blackmailing Senator Amidala worked better than expected. They made it so easy for him.

Cobra spun around in his chair, smiling to himself, the room becoming one big blur. He stopped, then drummed his fingernails on the top of his desk. How long til he left this awful metropolis? How long til he was on the lush green planet of Endor again? "Not long..." he mumbled to himself. He would leave when his knew wife was ready to leave. *After* she quit the senate. There was only room for one breadwinner in his family. Money meant power. So why let her have any?

Suddenly the door opened. One of Cobra's guards walked in. He wore a black jacket with gold detail. He carried a blaster strapped to his waist and walked very stiffly to his boss' desk.

"Sir, a message from Endor!" The guard saluted, turned on his heels, and walked out of the door.

Cobra leaned his chair back, index finger pressed thoughtfully under his nose. A letter from his home planet. A shipment he had been waiting for was in. Only, the space pirate who delivered it, refused to give it to Cobra's men. He wanted to see the Senator in person... perhaps to collect a higher pay. The cargo was definitely "sensitive". Illegal as far as the Republic was concerned. Cobra was in the business of mining spices on the side. Something the twi-leks used to get some type of high.

Cobra pressed a button on his desk and two guards entered the office. "Prepare my ship for a flight to Endor," he said in a hurried voice. Billions of credits were on the line.

Cobra strode down the hall past the Chancellor's office, ignoring the redguard outside of the door. With guards flanked by his side, he pressed the up button to the elevator and took it to the landing dock. Chancellor Palpatine gave his redrobes a suspicious look then spoke in his Sidious voice, "Take me to the landing dock, we're going to Endor..." then in a whisper, he spoke to himself... "I sense my plans are in danger..."

Cobra had the aura. The aura of a man of means. He was, indeed very successful so this depiction of him would not be far off. Thanks in part to the inheritance his grandfather gave him. He also managed to amass a large fortune on his own through the same illegal activities that brought him to Endor. Cobra grunted. This “pirate” was going to pay dearly, for having forced him to travel to the planet so late and on such short notice. Cobra understood greed better than anybody, but to hold his cargo hostage — well, that was crossing the line. And nobody crossed Cobra... nobody!

Cobra’s ship landed in a clearing deep within the forest with only the moon for light. The landing platform descended from the ship. Two guards stepped out, with Cobra just behind them. He stood with his hands on his hip, his feet meters apart. He looked around, his gaze finally settling on a shadow between the trees.

“What in the hell do you think you’re doing? Where’s my cargo?” Cobra yelled.

A cloaked figure raised a hand, then pointed deep into the darkened forest. Cobra’s shoulders dropped, he looked around, suddenly feeling a little nervous.

“Who are you? You the guy I hired?”

The man spoke, but it sounded as though he used a voculator. “Yes...” it said.

“Get out of the shadows. You’re acting real suspicous, buddy. And I don’t like it. Come out or the deal’s off.”

Cobra’s guards fixed their hands on their blasters, aiming at darkness. The shadow stepped forth. His foot cracked a branch in half and one of the guards, too nervous for his own good, fired a shot. A blue lightsaber flashed, deflecting the bolt back to him. And suddenly, the shadow was upon them. Down the first guard went in a whirl of blue light. Then the second with a blow of the force, knocked some feet away, into unconsciousness.

Cobra tried to run aboard the ship, but the shadow, now a cloaked man beneath the moonlight, was right behind him. A foot struck the Senator on the back of the leg and he went tumbling over the side of the platform. The shadow pulled the hood of the cloak from his face and threw the voculator aside. Anakin Skywalker stood over him. Cobra clamored away, practically walking on his ass.

Anakin activated his lightsaber.

“What are you doing?” Cobra yelled. “You’re nothing but a Jedi! You work for me! You can’t do this—”

“Oh, but I can... and I *will*, Senator.”

Cobra whimpered, seeing the futility of the situation. Anakin raised the lightsaber, fully prepared to feed him a ray of blue plasma.

“Wait!” Cobra screamed. “I can tell you who did this... it wasn’t me. Someone made me do it. Someone is trying to destroy you and Senator Amidala.”

Anakin’s weapon dropped to his side. “You’re lying. You’re the only one who knows—”

“No... I’m not the only one.”

Anakin raised the lightsaber again. “You told someone? Who? Tell me, and I’ll make your death quick and easy.” It was ugly, but it needed to be done. Anakin decided to deal with the guilt later. This went against everything he learned from the Order. But what else was there to do? He had no other choice. Anakin grimaced.

“I don’t understand... you’re a Jedi. Jedi are honorable and peace loving. A Jedi wouldn’t do this—”

“I’m not like the other Jedi,” Anakin replied. “Not where Padme is concerned.”

“Okay, I’ll tell the truth. I was told to ruin your relationship with the Senator Amidala. I was only doing what I was told. Following orders...” Cobra whimpered. “You understand, don’t you?”

Anakin smirked. He sensed Cobra was telling the truth. But it wasn’t enough to save him. “If what you say is true, then who ordered you to sabotage my relationship with Senator Amidala?”

“Cha—” was all he could get out. A bolt from a blaster ripped through the darkness and cut the Senator down. Anakin had already sensed the coming assault and had whirled around to deflect any further attack. But none came.

He turned and looked down at Cobra. There was a hole burned through his chest and blood spilled from his mouth.

Anakin backed away. Somehow, he was relieved to have been spared the dirty task of killing an unarmed man. He would leave, his honor still in tact. Too bad for Cobra, though. Perhaps he had crossed one person too many. Or someone... didn’t want Anakin to learn the truth.

Anakin landed his starfighter on Padme Amidala’s veranda. The hatch popped open and Anakin jumped out and ran inside. Padme walked toward him, and he grabbed her around the waist, sweeping her off of her feet. He looked happier than she had seen him in a long time.

“It’s over now,” Anakin said.

Padme smiled. “What’s over? What are you talking about?”

“Cobra Sien is dead. He won’t bother us anymore.”

Padme looked taken aback. He set her down. “Dead? You didn’t...”

He cut her off. “No,” Anakin answered. “Someone else... what’s strange is that Cobra was ordered to sabotage our relationship. I think I sensed it — this darkness. Only, I didn’t know what I was sensing. All I know is that, for the past few months this darkness had overcome me. It felt as though someone had set their will to disrupting the positive flow of energy from the force — against me. I couldn’t feel it for a long time. But the curse has lifted, Padme. Everything can go back to the way it was, when we were happy.” Anakin beamed.

“But what about this assassin? What if he tries to sabotage us again?”

"Doesn't matter. We know what he's trying to do. So it won't work. Though, something tells me he won't be bothering us again. He had the opportunity to come out and fight me man to man. But he didn't. I heard leaves rustling as he ran away."

Padme wrapped her arms around his neck. "I'm so happy, Ani. I'm so glad it's over."

"If only the war were over, then there'd be reason to celebrate."

"Is Obi Wan better? Are you to leave soon?"

Anakin looked solemn. "Yes, but I'm coming back," he added cheerfully. "I'm gonna end this war once and for all. Then I can finally leave the order and we can be together."

"I'll leave the Senate. We'll run away and no one will know where to find us."

He gazed at Padme, a warm feeling overcoming him. There was something different about her.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"I should leave now. Or I might not leave at all." He smiled, but it didn't hide the hurt look in his eyes.

Padme followed him to the veranda. "Goodbye, my love. Come back soon..." she said.

Anakin kissed her on the lips then climbed into his starfighter. Padme watched as it lifted and disappeared into the night sky. She then walked into the house, thinking about her day and where she spent it. There was something she neglected to tell Anakin. But he was so happy that she didn't want to ruin it or cause him to start worrying again.

Padme sat on the sofa and started sewing her pillow. How was she going to tell him that she's pregnant?

28. Be Well

I am following the revenge of the sith plot, ala “missing scenes” but am wondering if I should go AU with this and give Padme and Anakin my alternate story. What do you think? — CG

The morning sickness was severe. Severe enough that Padme Amidala was in need of being on bed rest, three droids at her side. Threepio was one of them. He laid a cool towel on Padme’s head, dabbing away the little beads of sweat.

“Oh dear, my lady. According to my internal thermostat, your temperature is exceedingly high. Please drink some water.” He tried to press a glass into her hand but she pushed it away.

The holonet was on. Pictures of Anakin played on the screen and something about the outer rim, and possibly dead. Threepio turned, looked at the holonet, stood then turned it off. Padme tried to sit up.

“Threepio, no. I need to see him—”

“I’m sure he’s safe, my lady. You’ll have to be mindful of your fluids, and take care of yourself if you want to get better.”

And that was precisely the problem. She needed him more than ever and here she was... *taking care of herself*. It wasn’t Anakin’s fault. Or was it? Blast. She was so confused. And then there were those awful rumors about him being killed in the war. If only the holonet reporter knew what those reports did to her nerves... the prospect of being alone and raising a child by herself wasn’t exactly how she planned her future. But then, neither was getting pregnant so soon. Padme sighed. There was no one to blame but herself. She married a Jedi. It’s not like she went into the situation blindly.

Despite Padme’s ruminations, she was happy about the baby. If Anakin died, part of him would live on through her. One of the nurse droids began to recite a report. An analysis of Padme’s blood sample. The nurse droid spoke in a series of chirps and beeps. Much like Artoo. Threepio translated:

“Apparently, the absence of calcium and an extreme deficiency of iron in your blood is causing you to become severely anemic. Which explains why you’ve taken ill. We can give you iron supplements, but your anemia is so dire, we’re not sure the supplements will be enough.”

“Ask her Threepio... if there is anything I can do.”

Threepio spoke in a series of chirps. The nurse droid replied in kind.

“She says, she will give you a list of foods to eat, a prescription for iron supplements, and encourages you to stay on bed rest for the duration of your pregnancy, if possible.”

"I can't do that, I'm a senator. I have far too many obligations."

"I advise you to listen to nurse D210, my lady. She knows what she's talking about."

"If I leave bed rest, will it hurt the baby?"

The nurse and Threepio exchanged chirps.

"NO, but it will hurt you, she says. Your body only produces enough iron and nutrients, for one. And the one who gets it is the baby. Without proper care, you won't be strong enough to deliver the baby. It's best to stay in bed. D210 would like to know, if you wish to learn the sex of your baby? She says, there's something else you should know about the pregnancy that might explain why your body is overtaxed."

Padme shook her head. "No, I want it to be a surprise. I don't want to know the gender of the baby, what he or she looks like, or whether he's too fat... nothing. I'll see him when he gets here."

Threepio looked at the Senator. Was there enough room in someone so small? Where *did* babies come from? And how did one get in Senator Amidala?

"Threepio?" she called.

"Yes, my lady."

"Will you go to the Temple and try, albeit subtley, to find out if Anakin is alright?"

Threepio saluted. "With pleasure, my lady!"

Threepio took the elevator down to the ground floor then walked... or rather, he tottered to the nearest air trolley. One that would take him to the temple. The air trolley's driver gave Threepio a strange look as he boarded. Threepio dropped a credit in the alien's hand. *Let's see if he can throw me off of the trolley now*, thought Threepio somewhat snidely. *The people here are just plain rude! And droids have no rights at all. Perhaps, Senator Amidala could work in our favor... making it against the law to harm droids like myself. Perhaps, I'll work hard and show my dedication and loyalty to the senator so that she sees the value of having a droid, and that we have... feelings.*

After an uneventful ride to the Jedi Temple, a grateful Threepio trotted to the entrance and walked inside. He looked around, not sure who he would even ask. Senator Amidala told him to "subtley" ask if Master Skywalker was okay. He scanned his programming for the word "subtley" but could not find a match.

Threepio turned and saw Jedi Master Mace Windu walking down the hall toward him. The man gave him a hard look. One that set Threepio's self preseveration components to full alert. *Was he going to hurt him? Why so angry?*

"Oh, Master Windu, Master Windu!" Threepio called, trying to run behind him.

The Jedi Master turned, looking at the protocol droid. "Senator Amidala sent me here to the temple to ask a very subtle question," he whispered, trying his best to look discreet. "She wants to know if Anakin Skywalker was killed?"

Threepio scanned Master Windu's face. His programming interpreted the expression on the Jedi's face. It was a look of confusion combined with irritation. "What do you mean, killed?"

"It was all over holonet news this morning."

"Oh. *That.* Tell Senator Amidala that Anakin Skywalker has been in contact with the Temple and that he's still alive."

"Oh this is good news! She should be very glad to hear of it."

Mace Windu furrowed his eyebrows. "Why does the senator want to know? What does it have to do with her?" There was something suspicious about this whole thing... he saw the way Senator Amidala looked at Anakin... that moony gaze in her eyes. He had sensed some very interesting feelings from her. Though luckily, nothing from Anakin at all. And he wanted to keep it that way.

Threepio scanned his memory: "Senator... Amidala... was *interested*... in hearing Master Skywalker's opinion on her current security detail," he recited.

"Tell Senator Amidala I would be more than happy to help her if she needs it. Anakin will be gone for a very long time." Mace Windu turned on his heels and walked away. Threepio spoke after him.

"Of course, thank you, Master Windu. As always, it was a pleasure speaking to you..."

After waiting on the trolley, and praying some buffoon didn't come along and dismantle him for the sheer pleasure of it, Threepio made it back to the senator's apartment a few hours later glad to be in one piece. Padme sat on the sofa, sewing a new pillow. She sat with her feet propped on the sofa cushions, very focused on the design she was making. She looked up, seeing Threepio enter the apartment. She sat the pillows beside her.

"Did you speak to one of the masters? Is Anakin alright?"

"Oh yes, Master Windu told me he was in contact with the temple today and is very much alive."

Padme gave a big sigh of relief. "I don't know how to thank you, Threepio."

"I'm sure I'll think of something, madame."

Suddenly, Padme lapsed into a fit of giggles. Threepio scanned her face. *Hmm. Happy. My lady?*" he said.

"I think the baby is very happy! Happy to learn his father is safe!"

"Oh?" Threepio asked, curiously cocking his head to the side. "How do you know?"

"Well, he just kicked."

"Oh no!" Threepio said in a panicked voice. "He actually kicked you?"

Padme smiled warmly. "Yes, he's been quite active. Come, see, Threepio."

Padme pulled the fabric of her gown tightly, enough to show the roundness of her belly. *Oh my, Poor Senator Amidala,* Threepio thought. She took his hand, guiding it to her

stomach. His sensors could feel how round and tight it was, then a thump! And then more thumping! Threepio pulled his hand away and looked very curiously at the Senator again.

“My, my, my... Senator Amidala, I believe he wants to get out.”

Padme clapped a hand over her mouth and laughed.

29. To Cuddle

Times were getting scarier by the day, and Padme found herself working more and more against the wishes of her nurse. Especially since the Chancellor's kidnapping by General Grievous. It was a sad twist indeed, and there was no telling what the monster would do to him. The only good news was that the Senate requested two of its best Clone War Jedi to save him: Obi Wan Kenobi, and her beloved, Anakin Skywalker. Were it not for this awful turn of events, Anakin would still be in the Outer Rim. The downside, was the possibility of his being killed whilst trying to save his friend.

Padme sat at her desk and whispered a prayer. The Republic was in horrible shape and she couldn't decide if it was worth saving anymore. At least, worth being saved by her. She wanted... *needed* to take her baby and husband away before one of them were killed. But that was just a fantasy. There were too many people out there counting on them both. She wouldn't even allow herself to think like that, much less act on it.

Padme's holoscreen sent a signal. She allowed the connection. Threepio appeared on screen. "Senator Amidala, Holonet News is reporting the death of Count Dooku, and the Chancellor's arrival on Coruscant with Master Skywalker, and Master Kenobi."

Padme's heart skipped a beat. "Thank you, Threepio. If anyone should ask, please tell them I will be in meetings all day."

"Of course, my lady," answered Threepio, dutifully.

Padme closed her datapad, then stood and adjusted her senatorial robes. She was visibly pregnant now. In fact, her pregnancy was an open secret. Thankfully, her colleagues had far too great a respect for her to ask questions... and for that, she was grateful.

Typho waited just outside of Padme's door. "Come Typho, please take me to the Jedi Temple."

"Of course, my lady," he answered, slightly reminiscent of Threepio only moments earlier.

Padme took the elevator to the top floor and boarded the waiting speeder. Typho climbed into the pilot's seat, and both strapped themselves in. From above the city, they could see shrapnel and bits and pieces of a crashed ship. Padme's heart caught in her throat. Threepio said Anakin was here... he didn't say Anakin was in good shape.

"Typho, land near the Temple garden, I'll walk from there."

Typho gave a sideward glance at her belly. "Are you sure my lady? The nurse droid said —"

"Typho, please... I'll be fine."

The ship gained clearance to land near the garden and a few minutes later, Padme was walking very slowly toward the temple. A large crowd had gathered near the side entrance. A

crowd of senators, like Bail Organa, Mon Mothma, Mas Amedda, Chancellor Palpatine, as well as Jedi Masters like Mace Windu and Yoda to name a few. So many people but no Ani...

Padme slipped behind a column and watched the excitement from afar. Then she saw him. Her Anakin stood at the center of the crowd. People touched him, pulled his clothing, shook his hand... some even hugged him. *She wanted hug him.* But this was the life of the Hero. The Hero With No Fear, as they called him. After a few moments of watching him mingle and act the part of Jedi poster boy, the crowd slowly dissipated and only Anakin and Bail Organa remained. But even as they talked, Anakin's eyes seldom engaged the senator, for he was looking for his beautiful wife, wondering where she was and why she hadn't come out to greet him. Bail Organa said something and Anakin replied. Then finally, his gaze swept by the column, and he saw Padme standing there, hiding in the shadows, patiently waiting... a smile as wide as the universe spread across his face. Anakin quickly bade Bail Organa goodbye, looked around, then ran toward her.

Padme fell into his arms, her head against his chest as she hugged him. "What are you doing over here?" he beamed.

"Oh Ani, I missed you," Padme said. "I'm so glad you're safe. I'm so glad you're here. There are so many things I want to say, so many things to tell you... and then there were rumors that you had been killed," she gasped.

"I missed you too," he replied. 'And I'm fine.' Anakin cupped Padme's chin, and tried to kiss her. But Padme pulled away. He gazed at her face, eyes searching. "What's wrong?" he asked.

Padme opened her mouth to speak, but he cut her off. Quickly gripping her by the shoulders. "Something's different. There's someone else, isn't it? I can sense it," he raged. "Who is it?" he yelled, shaking her forcefully.

Padme held tight to his arms, in a feeble attempt to stable herself. "Anakin, *please stop or you hurt us!*" she yelled.

"Tell me who—" he was saying, when suddenly, the words froze on his lips... "Did you say us?"

Padme nodded.

"What do you mean?" he asked, as though not fully understanding.

Padme fell into his arms again. "Ani, I'm pregnant."

He pried her away to look at her face. She did seem a little bigger... "Are you serious?"

Again, Padme nodded. She stared at his face, waiting for some type of reaction. A reaction other than shock. He stepped back for a moment, as though his knees were about to buckle, still holding her by the arms.

Padme's heart beat loudly in her chest. He was under enough stress with the Clone Wars, hiding their marriage, and waiting for the council to make him a Master...

But suddenly, he smiled. Then laughed. "This... is wonderful news," he said.

"Is it really?" Padme asked, her eyes filled with worry. "If the Jedi find out, you'll be expelled."

Anakin waved a hand irritably. "We'll worry about that when it's time to worry about it. Padme, you've made me happier than you can possibly imagine," he said, pulling her close.

Padme gave a worried sigh. "Oh Ani, what are we going to do?"

"We're going to take care of you, have our baby, and be the happiest parents in the world."

They walked off, toward the garden where Anakin kept his speeder. "We'll have to leave here," Padme said.

Anakin opened the hatch and helped Padme inside. "And go where?" he asked.

Padme sat in the co-pilots chair. Anakin climbed in beside her. She laid a hand on his lap. "Rea... it's my favorite place, next to Naboo. The ocean water is clear and blue... it's quiet and sandy. There's a villa there that I would love to have."

As if I can afford it, Anakin thought. "Say the word, and I'll leave everything now."

Padme shook her head. "No, we can't. Not yet. There's too much business to settle. The Clone Wars are almost over now that Count Dooku is dead. They'll fall apart. We have to see it through, then we can run away."

"How far along are you?"

"Five months."

"...and how long have you known?"

"Since the day you left."

"We should have run away then. But now, I'm in so deep, Padme."

Padme caressed his cheek. "We have a few months before the baby is born. I've waited for you before, and I'll wait for you now." Anakin stared out of the viewing window, eyes focused on the landing space on Padme's veranda.

The ship circled the apartment building, then finally, the thrusters were off and it was safe to land. Anakin opened the hatch and jumped out. He then walked to the other side, and helped Padme to the veranda safely.

"Are they sending you back?"

"No... I'm here for a few weeks, I believe. The Chancellor has requested it."

Padme's smile was ear to ear. He opened his robed and pulled her in. They hugged and watched as the sun set, then finally walked inside.

Anakin slipped to the bedroom, while Padme ordered her staff home for the evening, insisting they not return until specifically requested. The servants would still receive their pay and only the droids would remain. Droids knew how to follow orders. Droids, had no business around town where they might talk of Anakin being there.

Anakin managed to take a shower while Padme was away, dealing with administrative issues. When she returned, she found him in bed, a blanket covering the lower half of his body. His black glove was off, and his mechanical chrome colored arm, gleamed in the moonlight that shone through their window.

Padme sat the plates she carried on the nightstand. “Are you hungry?” she asked.

“Hungry for you.”

Padme smiled. “Anakin...” she droned. “What about the baby?”

“What about her?”

Her? “You might— hurt him,” Padme replied.

Anakin sulked, then slumped against the headboard. Padme suppressed a giggle as she walked out of the room... to the fresher to take a shower. When she returned a few minutes later, only a towel covered her wet body, from the breast down. He could see how round her belly was without the senatorial robe she wore earlier. He smacked his lips hungrily.

Padme sat on the edge of the bed, opened the chest, and grabbed a sleeping gown. Anakin’s favorite, she thought with some satisfaction. It barely fit her before, being a little too big, but now it fit just right, in the way the fabric fell against the curves of her body. Padme threw the blanket back then climbed beneath it. Anakin watched in silence for several moments, then finally leaned over and dropped his head onto her lap.

“Please... Padme?” he begged. “Please? Waiting to be with you is the only thing that kept me alive out there, and now you’re telling me I can’t have you.” He turned his head and gave her a wicked grin.

Padme sat up and slipped the gown from her shoulder. He rose from her lap to kiss it. “Okay, I give in... but promise you’ll be gentle.”

“I’ll be very gentle,” he whispered against her lips. Anakin cuddled beside her then slipped his hands beneath her gown, pulling it up. He let his hands roam until he found her belly, then leaned over to kiss it.

30. Flesh and Innuendos

“What are you doing?”

“I’m working.”

“What? I thought we agreed, no work today.” Anakin stared blankly at Padme, who sat in bed with a datapad on her lap.

“The whole day?”

“Yes, the whole day,” Anakin replied. “No Senate, no Temple... nothing. Just the two of us together.”

“but—”

“No buts,” Anakin said somewhat stubbornly. “At least not that kind,” he laughed.

Padme slapped him across the head. “Anakin!” she blushed.

Anakin dodged the second blow then buried his head into her bosom. “How hard is it to spend the day with the love of your life?” he mumbled against her skin.

“Get up, Anakin! You’ll crush the baby!”

“It’s my baby. She’s a trooper, she can take it.”

“You mean ‘he’ can take it.”

“Maybe it’s a he-she,” Anakin replied.

“That’s not funny,” Padme objected. “How could you wish such a thing?” she rubbed her belly, as if to soothe the unknowing little one from his joke.

“What’s wrong with being a he-she? The Chucucoocomaca’s are he-she, they even —”

Padme raised a hand in the air in protest. “Oh Anakin, please... no more stories about your crazy adventures with Obi Wan.”

“I thought you liked those stories?” He gave her a look of mock hurt.

“I do, but in small doses,” she smiled.

Anakin tried to pull the datapad from Padme’s hand, but she snatched it back. He growled contemptuously.

“You’re awfully feisty today.”

“I’m always feisty. You can’t imagine what I put up with while you were gone. Like that Cobra situation—”

This time, Anakin’s hand raised in protest as he cut her off. “Don’t you dare speak his name to me.”

"And then there was Chancellor Palpatine," Padme griped.

"What's wrong with the Chancellor? The Chancellor is a great man!" Anakin objected.

"He's a toad."

"Oh, well you're just being mean. I suppose it's the pregnancy hormones talking and not my Padme."

Anakin snatched the datapad again and tried to read, but Padme pulled it away. "You can't read that! Conflict of interest," she cited.

"Says the boss..."

"Dont' call me that."

"Well it's true," Anakin replied. Then in a whisper as he brushed her hair aside... "But I'm the boss in here..."

Padme sat the datapad on the night stand then turned over, navigating her ever growing belly to face him. "You sure about that?"

Anakin grabbed her by the wrists. "What are you gonna do about it?"

"I have a blaster under this bed to shoot you with."

"I'm terrified, Padme," he said, taking a deep breath, while folding his arms behind his head. "But your blaster is no match for my lightsaber."

"Of course, you're a Jedi, I expect you to use a lightsaber."

"Not that kind of lightsaber," Anakin said in a naked voice. He covered her belly with a hand. Irked, Padme pushed him away.

"You're awful when you tease," she pouted.

"So are you."

Padme rolled her hand into a fist and clapped him on the head with her knuckles. Anakin winced. "Were you not teasing me last night in that gown?"

Padme blushed... "well, just a little." She laughed. A thoughtful look surfaced in Anakin's eyes.

"Now that I'm home, you don't have to worry about doing everything by yourself."

"Don't worry my love, Threepio helped me."

"Did he really?"

Padme nodded. "You made Threepio, so, in a sense, you were helping me."

"I like that," Anakin said. "Have we decided on a name for our he-she?"

Padme looked close to striking him again. Anakin buried his head in her bosom as she neared. "You wouldn't strike an unarmed man would you?"

"I will name him Luke. If it's a girl, we'll name her Leia."

Anakin nodded. "I like that... has a nice 'ring' to it." He looked at Padme again, seeming to undress her naked body with his eyes.

"Don't leer, Anakin. You know I hate when you do that."

"I can't help it, you're so beautiful."

Padme smiled. "It embarrasses me."

"I'm embarrassed to have leered at you. Especially when you yelled at me before we went to Naboo a few years ago. But I couldn't help it. I couldn't help myself," he said, caressing her shoulders with the back of his hand.

"But you're a Jedi. Have you not learned anything from Obi Wan?"

"Dont' give me that Obi Wan crap. Obi Wan simply hides his lust better than I am able to. If you have ever seen him drunk, you'd know what I'm talking about."

"Obi Wan was drunk?"

"Many many times. Falling off of bar stools, even getting into fights. He's an awful drinker. He even made me fight him when he was drunk, once."

Padme laughed. "You're lying."

"I'm not."

"Please, stop—" Padme laughed. Anakin was always taking funny little shots at Obi Wan, but generally only meant to make her laugh. Anakin gave her a serious look.

"I was sixteen summers when it happened. The only time I ever beat him in a lightsaber match."

"Pupils seldom outmatch their masters."

"Someday I will," Anakin replied. He knew it to be true. He knew, somewhere in the back of his mind that he would have to. His hope was that, Obi Wan didn't turn evil one day, forcing them to square off. That seemed the only likely possibility. "I don't want to talk about Obi Wan anymore," he said, somewhat solemnly.

Anakin grabbed her hand and pulled it beneath the blanket. He led her toward the lower region of his body. "So early in the morning?" Padme whispered. He pulled her body, crushing her against his chest.

"I feel good in every way when we're like this. You make me happy."

He then rolled her over, spooning against her body. "Be careful of the baby," Padme moaned.

"I'm always careful of the baby." He was muscular and hard against her. Anakin muttered something about her being so good, feeling so good to him. However, a few sighs into their lovemaking later, there was a knock on the door. Anakin gave an angry growl.

"I'll get it."

"But it's day time," Padme objected.

"You're in no condition to answer it. Let whoever it is think what they want."

Indeed, Anakin was still high from their lovemaking, and uncaring about what anyone should think. Especially any unknowing suitors who might stop by. Let them see him there, wearing only a pair of pants. Let them draw their own conclusions and eat their hearts out.

Anakin left the bedroom and answered the door. He practically cried out, in seeing who was on the other side. Obi Wan Kenobi. A second time his carelessness had exposed his relationship with Senator Amidala.

Obi Wan Kenobi walked in, a curious smile on his face. "I figured I might find you here."

"Really? Anakin said, swiveling to follow the master with his eyes as he walked into the apartment and sat on the couch."

"Well... you and Senator Amidala are friends? Aren't you?"

"Very good friends," Anakin replied, sitting across from him.

Obi Wan could smell the stench of their lovemaking emanating from Anakin's perspired skin. "Ah, yes... so it would seem."

"I happened across the Senator in the market. She said she was having trouble with some 'plumbing' and I offered to help."

"Interesting. I can see that you're pretty wet."

"I hung my shirt to dry. I'll be back in it soon enough, don't worry, Master."

"And Senator Amidala? Is she well? She looked a bit... I don't know... *fuller*."

"I wouldn't know anything about that. It's not like I've been paying attention to her figure... at least, enough to notice any changes."

Obi Wan's gaze was steel. "We have a meeting tomorrow," he replied. "The council would like to meet with you, for a briefing on Chancellor Palpatine's rescue."

"You couldn't tell me this over comlink?"

Obi Wan laughed. "I thought it better to come and *visit you*, in person."

Anakin stood, arms folded behind his back. Obi Wan walked toward the door. He turned, looking Anakin up and down, head to feet. "Be sure to shower before you go. You wouldn't want to walk into the meeting with the smell of a man who does... a bit of '*plumbing*' on the side."

31. Old Friend

The market was a suffocating mesh of bodies as Padme pried and pressed her way through the crowd as she shopped for fruits and vegetables, something for the meal she would share with Ani. She stopped near a bollop cart, and grabbed the coarse round fruit. She looked at the vendor, an alien woman and smiled, signaling how much with her hand. The woman raised four fingers.

Padme dropped the fruit in her linen sack and gave the woman four credits. They smiled at each other, then Padme walked away. Their transaction drew the attention of several vendors who waved the best of their fruit at the Senator. She smiled, stopping near a vegetable cart.

The vegetable vendor, ever eager to please, shuffled through his cart for the shiniest Cotto — a long green vegetable, usually sliced and steamed before eating.

“Thank you,” Padme said in a polite voice. She opened her sack again, and moved to give the hairy looking vendor six credits. But the man waved the payment away in protest.

“No, you take for free!” he said in a demanding, almost fatherly voice.

Padme smiled, “No, please... I couldn’t,” she replied, shaking her head.

“Nice vegetable for the Senator, no?”

The smile she gave him was amazing. “How did you know I was a senator?”

“Mica see you on Holonet, no?”

“Ah, I see. I appreciate your generosity, but I insist on paying you. Your kindness would better serve someone who needs it.”

The man’s head dropped as he extended a grubby paw. “Ah, maybe next time?”

Padme gave him the credits and waved goodbye. She then walked through the market, trying her best not to trip over her gown. She thought about the Queen, and whether or not she’ll let her serve out her term on the senate while at the same time, hoping the price to pay wouldn’t be to reveal the name of her child’s father. Everyone knew about the pregnancy now. It was only a matter of time before questions were asked.

Just as Padme approached a flower cart, something for the dining room table, someone tapped her on the shoulder. She turned, stunned eyes falling to the face of her old maid, Dorme.

“My lady!” Dorme exclaimed in surprise. The two women hugged and exchanged kisses.

“Dorme, Dorme, what are you doing here on Coruscant? I thought you were on Naboo?”

Dorme held her by the hands, standing back to look at her old boss. “My father has a cart here. My... my senator, look at you. You’re glowing.”

"Well, more than glowing..." Padme said, peeking through her lashes at Dorme. She rubbed her belly, almost showing it off.

"Oh... my lady," Dorme exclaimed. "A baby!"

"Yes!" Padme exclaimed. "I'm so happy Dorme, happier than I've ever been."

"I'm happy for you, but sad I didn't get an invitation to the wedding." Dorme gave her a hurt look, then laughed it off.

Padme was empathetic, holding her friend's hand and walking. "Well..." she sighed. "It's complicated. The wedding was really private. Just the two of us."

"The two of you? Well... who is he?"

"I can't tell you."

"My lady, have I ever betrayed your trust? I must know!" Dorme gushed.

Padme laughed. "I can't tell you here. Come to my apartment and have dinner with us tonight."

"Really?"

"Of course. You know where I live, don't you?"

Anakin slid a glove over his mechanical arm, moaning and groaning irritably. Padme gave him a terse look, as she set the table for three.

"How do you know she won't tell anyone?"

"I trust Dorme with my life. How many times has she risk her own to save mine? She was my only friend for many many years."

Anakin circled the table and pulled Padme into his arms. "I was hoping," he whispered against her lips... "the two of us could spend some quality time."

"But Anakin, now that you're the Chancellor's aide to the Council, you'll be here every night. We're not worlds apart anymore. It shouldn't pain you to share me with Dorme for a few hours..."

"What if I don't want to?" he mumbled stubbornly.

"Then you won't get the surprise I have for you, tonight." Padme stood on her toes and kissed his lips.

"What kind of surprise?" he smiled.

Padme pulled out of his arms then looked over her shoulder as she walked toward the living room, "You'll find out later," she whispered in a seductive voice.

Anakin wanted nothing more than to rush her, sweep her off of her feet and get his "surprise" right away. The doorbell rang. Padme walked, nearly ran to answer it.

She opened the door and Dorme stood on the other side. The women hugged. “Thanks for coming Dorme,” Padme gushed. She turned and made a gesture to Anakin. “You remember Anakin Skywalker don’t you?”

Dorme turned, giving her a sharp look. “Your husband?” she whispered.

Anakin lumbered to the door where they stood, looking as though it pained him to even bother. “Pleasure seeing you again,” he grumbled.

“Likewise,” Dorme said with a courtesy. Her eyes met his.

“Well now that we have greetings out of the way, let us sit and eat,” Padme said excitedly. “I made Cotto, cheese, and grass weeds in red langley sauce.”

“Sound delightful,” Dorme exclaimed, turning to peek at Anakin as Padme left for the kitchen.

Anakin gave Padme’s former handmaiden a bored look. Dorme smiled. “So...” she started. But Padme walked in again, interrupting her friend before she could speak. Anakin’s eyes remained fixed on Dorme, his hand frozen under his nose. He then turned to Padme, a confused look on his face.

“Is something wrong?” Padme asked in a pleasant voice.

“No, I was just... waiting for your delicious meal,” he replied, a bit stiffly.

He stood and pulled Padme’s chair then pushed her close to the table when she was seated. Ever the gentleman, he then walked around to Dorme’s and pulled hers. She let her hand graze the front of his pants as she sat. Anakin jumped back and stumbled over a coffee table. Padme gave him a funny look.

“Honey, are you okay?”

Dorme looked over her shoulder and smirked.

“I’m fine,” Anakin griped, somewhat embarrassed. He took the long way to his seat, avoiding any and all contact with Dorme.

Padme beamed at her friend, her eyes a blanket of stars.

“So, when did *it* happen? The two of you? I don’t mean to be rude, Master Skywalker, but are Jedi allowed to marry?” He sensed, Dorme already knew the answer to the question, but for some reason decided to annoy him in asking.

Anakin sat his fork next to his plate and looked at Padme. It was an “I told you so look”, but she ignored him, directing her attention to Dorme.

“It’s complicated,” Padme said. “We love each other and we’re going to have a baby. Padme reached over and held Anakin’s hand. They smiled knowingly at each other then looked at Dorme again.

Dorme looked down at her plate, pushing the food around with her fork. “I’m happy for you,” she said, in what sounded like a whisper. “You seem to have everything a woman could possibly want.”

Again, Anakin had a bad feeling. But what was the point of telling Padme? She wouldn't believe him anyway. "Any plans to marry?" Anakin asked.

"Oh, me? Who would marry a handmaiden?"

Anakin laughed. "I know plenty who would. Are maidens not the most beautiful women on any planet?"

Padme jabbed him in the rib with an elbow.

"Uh, that is, next to my wife..."

"Someday," Dorme replied, smiling. She looked at the two of them again, then blushed. "Forgive me, I guess I'm a little shocked that the two of you are together. Him being a Jedi, your being a Senator. And don't worry my lady, I won't tell a soul."

"I didn't doubt you for a second," said Padme, consolingly. "It's just that it feels so good to talk to someone about this. To share our love openly for a change."

Anakin took her hand in his and kissed it. Padme gazed lovingly at her husband.

He stood.

"I think I'm done now, my love. If you don't mind, I'm going to excuse myself. I'm sure you have a lot of catching up to do."

Anakin stood and withdrew from the table. "Are you sure?" Padme asked.

"Yeah I'm feeling a little tired." *Tired of looking at Dorme*, he thought.

"I'll be back," Padme said, leaping out of her seat and looking over her shoulder at her friend. The gorgeous young woman nodded politely, tossing the food around on her plate again. She then waited until the loving couple was out of sight, then switched Padme's untouched drink with her own.

In the bedroom, Padme stormed by Anakin, hands on her hips. "What are you doing?" she whispered angrily.

"Getting reading for my surprise," he smiled.

Anakin pulled his pants down and tossed them across the room. Then off went the shirt. He then plopped down on top of the blanket, legs spread eagle with his hands parked beneath his head.

Padme watched, an amused look on her face.

"Don't be long my love," he whispered. Anakin closed his eyes comfortably, and dismissed her with a wave of his gloved hand. He didn't know the surprise she had in store was a locket of a mini wedding picture that she wanted him to wear around his neck.

A few minutes later, Padme walked into the dining room again. "I'm sorry, Dorme, Anakin is really tired. He's had a long day."

"No worries, my lady. It was great fun. Brief, but fun. So, tell me, are you having a boy or girl?"

"A little boy I suspect. Mother's intuition." The women giggled. Padme took a sip of her drink.

"I would be happy to have a child of my own. But, I suppose I'd need a husband first..." *maybe even yours*, she thought.

Padme took another sip of her drink. The women sat quietly for a second. Dorme watched, as Padme's eyelids closed and opened.

"Well..." said Padme sleepily. "What have you... what have you been up to? Are you working for your father now?"

"Yes, but he's terribly strict. I can't wait to get away. But enough about poppi. Are you planning a baby shower? Maybe I can throw one for you."

"That would be wonderful!" Padme exclaimed. But who will we invite?"

"We need only ourselves," Dorme laughed. "Though, the other girls would never forgive me if I didn't invite them."

"They can never know that Anakin is the father."

Dorme took a sip of her drink, looking over the rim at Padme. "Don't worry. I'll never tell."

Padme waved a hand, fanning herself. "I feel so warm," she said, face flustered.

"Really?" Dorme replied, mock concern in her voice. "Is there anything I can do?"

To Padme her friend had become a blur. "Yes... I'm sorry Dorme, can you please help me to the sofa... I think you should get Anakin, something's wrong. I think something is wrong with the baby," she gasped.

Dorme stood, a calculated look on her face. She watched as Padme slumped over her plate.

The Senator stretched a hand, reaching as Dorme moved toward her. "I'm coming, my lady, don't worry. I'll take care of Master Skywalker for you... *I promise*."

She waited until Padme was fully unconscious, then pulled her chair back and helped the pregnant woman from the seat over to the couch. Dorme laid her gently on the cushions, then propped her feet on top of a pile of pillows.

It wasn't fair. Padme Amidala had everything. And what did she have? Nothing. And now, the senator was with the man she wanted? Since the day she saw Anakin on Naboo — back when he was just a Padawan learner coming to help his Master sort out the assassination plot against Padme — Dorme had wanted him. But he was obviously, very obviously in love with the Senator. And all she could do was watch and long for him from afar. She kept in touch over the years via Holonet News. Another outlet that caused her misery, seeing him night after night knowing she would never have the opportunity to see him again... until now.

Dorme walked through the large apartment, looking from room to room until she saw a figure down the hall in what appeared to be the master bedroom. She pushed the door aside, staring in on a naked body , visible only by the moonlight that streamed into the window.

Dorme walked in. She hoped, fingers crossed that he was asleep. She meant him no harm. She meant quite the opposite. She hoped he'd see the light. She stood a safe distance from the bed, undetected as she slipped the dress over her head.

"Padme?" Anakin called. He stirred.

Dorme slipped to the foot of the bed and let her hands slide up his legs as she crawled over him. She pressed her naked body on top of his, pushing the lower region of her body against his own. He pulled her close. A haze of sleep kept his eyes closed. Until he realized, this was not the body of his pregnant wife.

Anakin jolted upright, pushing Dorme aside as he jumped out of bed. "What do you think you're doing?" Anakin snapped.

Dorme stayed on the bed, legs curled beneath her. He could see her breasts in the darkness, the perky nipples sitting upright.

She climbed out of bed and walked toward him, but Anakin stumbled backwards, into a wall. "Please, Anakin, don't turn me away... I've wanted this for so long," Dorme pleaded. "Just this once, and I'll go away."

"I — uh, I don't understand," Anakin whispered. The thought of being with anyone other than Padme never crossed his mind. It never crossed his mind because it was something he never wanted... *until now*.

Dorme grabbed his hand and pulled it to her breast. "You understand this, don't you?"

Anakin snatched his hand away.

"Where's Padme?" he asked.

"Asleep."

He looked into Dorme's eyes, and suddenly, a steel hand reached out and grabbed her throat. Dorme smiled. *As long as he was touching her.*

"When you came to Naboo... I wanted you so badly," she choked.

"I don't care. I'm in love with Padme. And since you've hurt her... possibly even hurting my child, you'll never want me again when I'm done with you."

Dorme tried to pry his hand away, but instead sank to the floor. Anakin stood over her nude body. He blinked.

Padme.

Anakin slid into his pants then raced to the living room, calling Threepio and D210, anyone who might help.

32. Vicious Seduction

"Master, D210 reports that Senator Amidala will be alright," came the voice of Threepio. Anakin hardly heard him. He sat beside Padme, holding and kissing her hand.

"And the baby?"

D210 and Threepio exchanged a series of chirps. "The pregnancy is going well... but she's afraid—"

Anakin turned, looking at the droids for the first time. "Afraid of what?" he barked.

Threepio took a step back. He and D210 launched into a series of chirps, Threepio looking at Anakin and throwing his hands in the air derisively before turning to D210 again. Apparently, D210 had mentioned something the Senator did not wish to tell! Threepio was quite upset about the breach of confidence.

"I, uh..."

"Threepio," said Anakin crisply. "What are you hiding?"

"Shall I get the Senator some water? She looks quite thirsty..." Threepio had been instructed not to tell master Skywalker about the problems. The senator said it would worry him incessantly.

The protocol droid scanned Master Skywalker's face. Computing... *anger, danger, alert*. Threepio began to knit an imaginary sweater with his hands, his fingers twisting nervously.

"D210 said... Senator Amidala will be out for a few days. The concoction poured in her drink is non-lethal, but can easily overwhelm a woman in Senator Amidala's condition. In a normal healthy pregnancy, the effects would wear off in hours... but in Senator Amidala's case..." Threepio couldn't tell him that she was already physically overtaxed. The Senator wouldn't want it. "She's going to be alright."

"Three days without Padme?" Anakin whispered, his eyes fixed on something distant and unseen. "I-I don't think I can do it."

"Master Skywalker, I assure you, Senator Amidala will be fine. I promise to take good care of her," Threepio assured. "I always do."

Anakin leaned forward and kissed Padme on the forehead softly. Her eyelashes fluttered and he waited for her to awake. She didn't. He backed away, then stood, turning to Threepio. "You always do," he repeated.

"Uh, Master... what about our 'houseguest'? Seems she's still asleep on the Senator's bedroom floor in a rather...(sigh) interesting position."

Anakin's mouth twisted to a look of disgust. What was he to do with Dorme? He couldn't even look at her. Not without doing something to hurt her for what she did to Padme — what she did to him.

"Throw her out on the street—"

"But sir, she's not wearing any..."

"That's not our problem Threepio. Get rid of her."

Threepio sighed. "Very well, master..." *so rude*, he thought.

Anakin walked down the hall of Senator's court, his black cape flailing wildly behind him in the drafty corridor breeze. He cringed, thinking of Padme and her being unconscious. It was his fault, he sensed something was wrong with Dorme but left his wife alone with the handmaiden anyway. How was he going to tell her about Dorme? Would she believe him?

He stopped outside the Chancellor's door. He needed to talk — anyone would do. Suddenly, Anakin thought better of it. He couldn't tell anyone about this. No one. It was too humiliating. Anakin turned on his heels and walked toward the elevator, and felt a very familiar presence. A comforting one. A presence that always seemed to give him the right answers. Sometimes, answers he didn't like, but the right ones nonetheless.

"Anakin? What are you doing here?" Obi Wan asked, a look of surprise on his face.

"I'm on an errand for Senator Amidala."

Obi Wan gave him a funny look. "Figures," he replied somewhat tersely. "What are you Anakin? A Jedi? Or Senator's aide?" he griped.

"Padme has fallen ill."

Obi Wan immediately regretted the harsh words. "OH dear..." he said, patting Anakin on the shoulder. "I'm terribly sorry to hear that. I know the two of you are good friends. Will she be okay?"

"Yes, Master. Though she's in a coma... a light one that is expected to last a few days."

"This is quite grave. More than I might have expected to hear. You know how deep my admiration of the senator is. Please keep me posted, will you, Anakin?"

Anakin sighed. It was a heavy sigh that brought his eyes to the floor to stare at their boots. A sigh he gave when he was troubled the most. It made Obi Wan nervous.

"Master... may I talk to you about something? It's deeply personal."

If this was Anakin's confession about his relationship with Padme, Obi Wan was suddenly very reluctant to hear it. Knowing would put him in a position to act. Or not act. And the truth was, he would never betray Anakin. He loved him... he was like a son... his brother.

"Sure," Obi Wan swallowed nervously. "Whatever you tell me will be held in the strictest confidence. You know this, Anakin. I sense, you are very deeply troubled. Let us take a walk."

The two men walked in silence, taking the elevator down to the ground floor and walking a few blocks to capital garden. A place, where Anakin often met with Padme — their secret

place. Obi Wan sensed the pair had been there before. There were traces of both Anakin and Padme near the gazebo where he now stood with his apprentice.

Anakin turned his back to the master, looking over his shoulder ever slightly. Obi Wan thought about the senator being injured and in a coma, and slowly pieced a story together.

"Anakin... you didn't do anything to *hurt* Padme, did you?"

Anakin turned, giving the master a hurt look. "How could you think that? You think I'm some type of monster? I could never hurt Padme... never—"

Obi Wan waved a hand. "I'm sorry, it seemed..."

"I know how it seems. You always think the worst of me!"

"I'm sorry, Anakin," Obi Wan stressed. "Please forgive me, I just don't have a clue as to what could be so difficult for you. We've talked about many things. You know you can trust me."

"I'm not sure I can trust you with this."

The situation must be really grave, Obi Wan thought.

"I was assaulted," Anakin said.

"Assaulted? Is that all? You're soon to be the most powerful Jedi in the history of the Order. You're hardly defenseless."

"NO, master. Not that kind of an assault..." Anakin's voice went flat. He turned, head down as he peered through his lashes at Obi Wan. "Not the kind I could fight."

Obi Wan's face turned three shades of red, light to dark. "Oh dear," he mumbled, hand stroking his ginger colored beard.

Anakin whirled around and stalked toward the stairs of the gazebo. "I knew I shouldn't have said anything," he raged.

He warned Anakin about the dark clothes, the punkish haircut and being a "sex symbol". He could have chosen a more appropriate look. Like his. He warned him about being on holonet news everyday, and how the girls were going to love him. . It was only a matter of time before something awful happened. But then... HOW could it happen to someone as strong and easily to defend himself as Anakin? Whoever it was, might have been powerful indeed. Perhaps someone who wasn't female.

"No, wait, Anakin... I— uh, I'm sorry I just didn't know what to say, please come back."

Anakin reluctantly turned, slowly walking up the gazebo stairs again.

"Do you mind my asking how it might have happened?"

"I was asleep and she crawled into bed. Before I realized it, she had taken advantage of me."

"You don't mean the senator do you?"

Anakin waved a hand irritably. If it was the senator he'd still be in bed, taking advantage of *HER*.

"No."

Obi Wan thought about it and realized the question didn't make sense. This was apparently a crime of coercion, equal to rape. In fact, it *was* rape. Obi Wan wasn't sure he could approach the subject in a sensitive or tactful manner. Anakin was obviously very troubled by the situation... and it's never the victim's fault.

"Who is it? We can take her before the courts and have her punished. You've taken a vow of celibacy and she violated that vow."

That vow was blown to bits eons ago, Anakin thought. Both men suddenly flushed.

"And tell everyone?" Anakin griped. "It would be humiliating. I would become a joke."

"What can we do then? Let me take you before the council. There have been cases of this happening before, we can help you."

"No! You promised our conversation would be held in strictest confidence. Please don't report it to the council, it would embarrass me. You don't understand, master."

"You think my integrity has never been challenged before? You think I've never been place in compromising positions?"

None that you didn't like... Anakin thought.

"Who is she? Let me talk to her, let me straighten her out."

"And have her giggling that I ran home to daddy? Big brother? Like a hopeless child? Not on your life. Forget it, Obi Wan. I — just... don't know what to do." He couldn't tell the master that he was worried about Padme finding out. Not without him knowing that he and Padme were together.

Obi Wan pressed him on the shoulder. "Who was it?"

Anakin sighed, looking at Obi Wan's face. "Dorme. Padme's former handmaiden."

The news was met with a look of surprise. "I do remember her nursing a rather serious crush on you."

"And you didn't tell me?"

"What was the point? It's not like you could have done anything about it. Anakin, I'm here for you when you want the help. As a Jedi you will come across many things that are unpleasant to you. Have you not honored any of my teachings? My advice is to let it go... meditate."

"With flashes of her— floating around in my head?" he flung his hand wildly — angrily.

"You've seen worse," Obi Wan griped. "Without taking you in for treatment or taking her before the courts... there is nothing we can do. Stay away from Dorme. I have a feeling, she isn't done with you yet."

"As do I, master. I wish it were otherwise."

"I'm here if you wish to talk again."

Talking did seem to help. The men nodded, a look of understanding passing between them. Obi Wan walked away.

Anakin paced the veranda of his and Padme's apartment, a blanket of stars twinkling over his head. "I should tell her the truth," he thought, biting his lip."

Were it a patch of grass he was walking upon, it would have worn thin by now. Occasionally, Threepio appeared with glasses of water and offers of food. But Anakin declined. He traveled to the bedroom every hour or so, checking on Padme and praying she would wake up. Her breathing was stable and he sensed she and the baby were alright. Though, the baby seemed to have a strongly dominant presence, a presence that seemed to overtake his wife. If he had to choose... if he had to choose between Padme and the baby...?

Anakin stopped his pacing and gripped the balcony's handrailing until steel shrieked. He closed his eyes, not wanting to think of negative things. "*Meditate... Obi Wan said to meditate.*"

Anakin closed his eyes, letting the events of the past two days pass through him. *Calm, center. He thought of being out on the battlefield.* If only everyday life were so uncomplicated.

"Mind if I join you?" a soft voice called out.

Anakin turned sharply. The voice startled him. But nothing could be more startling than seeing Dorme back in Padme's apartment.

"What are you doing here?" he snapped. A look of murder filled his eyes.

"Padme gave me the security code."

Dorme walked onto the veranda with her hands behind her back. Her eyes were locked on Anakin's face, a look of lust within them.

"She asked me to be the baby's godmother. To drop in and help out. You know, like the old days."

"You poisoned her."

"I took a chance. I love Padme, I really do. But I love you more," Dorme said. "I want to have a child — your child. I want to be married to you. But Padme is in the way," she pouted.

Anakin gave her a look of pure disgust. Dorme walked close to him, bringing her head beneath his chin the way Padme does. "That will never happen," Anakin said in a low voice.

"Your heart is racing," Dorme replied. She ran a hand up his chest seductively. Anakin leaned away in an attempt to avoid the vicious seduction.

He felt powerless. How do you fight a woman who can't fight back? It's not like she's Asajj Ventress or something. Someone he could settle the matter with over a lightsaber duel.

By comparison she was more helpless than he, and used it to her advantage.

Dorme slid down his chest letting her hand and lips trail his body as she sank to his ankles, her fingers pausing over the bulge in his pants. He grabbed her by the arm and yanked her to her feet. He could blast her over the edge of the veranda without even touching her. But how would he explain it to Padme? How would he explain it to the murder investigators that the council would send from the temple? Obi Wan knew about Dorme. Obi Wan would know he pushed her over the ledge.

Dorme met his gaze defiantly. She was much worse than Cobra had ever been. Anakin suddenly felt guilty for having accused Padme in the first place. At least Padme never let the shady senator have his way with her... like Anakin had with the handmaiden.

Anakin was close to spitting in Dorme's face, but held back, biting down his anger and rage — He held tight to Dorme's arm, yanked then drug her from the veranda, through the living room toward the door.

“Don’t come back, Dorme.”

“Don’t worry, I won’t tell anyone. Not about you and Padme, or you and I...” she said, her voice dropping.

“There is no you and I.” He shoved her out and blew the door closed with the force. He didn’t even wait to hear her body slam on the floor.

Anakin marched through the living room, calling Threepio by name.

“Yes, master?”

The droid had been recharging, and thankfully hadn’t seen anything. “Change the security code on the door right away.”

“Of course, master. Is something wrong?”

“Yes... and that’s why we’re going to change it. Give the new code to no one, especially the old handmaiden, Dorme.”

“Yes, Master Skywalker.”

Threepio walked toward the door, plugging in to communicate with the computer.

33. Sleeping Beauty

Three days since Padme had fallen ill and finally, it seemed she would wake up. Anakin sat beside her resting body, her hand pressed to his face. He gazed at her, watching as her eyes fluttered and slowly opened. He was happy to be the face she opened her eyes to.

“Ani?” she groaned in a raspy voice.

He leaned forth and kissed her on the lips. “How do you feel?” he smiled.

“Like... a ton of bricks dropped on my head. What happened? Why am I so tired?” Padme tried to sit up but a wave of dizziness forced her to lay back down. She slipped her hand from Anakin’s grip and rubbed her belly. The baby kicked and flipped. She could almost see the head rising and sinking back down through the covers.

“Wow. Somebody’s happy to be awake.”

“I’m hungry, Ani, please get me something to eat.”

“Of course,” he replied. Anakin left the bedroom in search of Threepio. The only food he ever made usually grew on trees and were eaten raw — while on missions with Obi Wan. Otherwise, Padme either cooked, or a chef at the Temple.

Padme looked around, wondering why she was in the guest room. Unbeknownst to her, Anakin had placed her there, not wishing her to lay in the same bed that Dorme had so callously violated. Not until the sheets were burned.

A few minutes later, Anakin returned, D210 and Threepio in tow. He sat a plate of food on a tray at the foot of the bed. “I thought D210 should have a look at you. I’m not sure if there is something you shouldn’t eat.”

Padme smiled. “Don’t make a fuss over me, Anakin. I’m fine.”

“Oh you’re anything but fine, Senator Amidala. You were out for a solid three days!” Threepio chided.

Anakin turned, giving the protocol droid a piercing stare. Padme looked from Threepio to Anakin.

“Three days?”

“Don’t worry about it, my love. I just want you to get well.”

“Get well from what?”

“You... you got sick the other night when Dorme was here. Your iron was low, your sugar was high and you collapsed,” Anakin lied. He had rehearsed it many times before saying it to her just now. He couldn’t tell Padme what Dorme had done. It would break her heart.

“Oh! I must have ruined the whole dinner,” Padme mumbled. “Perhaps I should invite her again.”

"No!" Anakin and Threepio exclaimed in unison. Padme gave the pair a strange look.

"Your immune system is a bit low and we don't want to drag any unseemly bugs into the house. You must get well, my lady," Threepio smartly replied. Anakin gave him a smile of approval.

"If you say so..." Padme chirped. Her head was starting to clear and the bright sunlight streaming into the room was starting to bother her less.

"D210, are there any restrictions on my recovery?"

D210 and Threepio exchanged chirps.

"No restrictions at all, she says. Just eat well, take your iron supplements, and stay in bed."

Looking at Anakin, a sly grin on her face, Padme replied. "Well... that can't be too bad. Oh! Ani, what about work? They must be worried senseless."

"Already taken care of. I stopped by the Chancellor's office to report your illness."

"Excellent. He really dotes on you, Anakin. Hearing it from you should prevent him from lobbying a complaint."

Padme threw the covers back and stepped out of bed.

"What are you doing?" Anakin asked.

"I'm gonna walk around. It's not too soon is it?"

D210 chirped.

"You're completely recovered," Threepio said. The drug was out of her system now.

Anakin held Padme's hand, allowing her to stumble like a toddler as she got her bearings. He linked her elbow into his and walked her to the veranda, into bright sunlight. Padme wore hair in curls that fell to her shoulders freely with no makeup on her face. She looked more beautiful than he had ever seen her. The soft curve of her belly, the way she held her hands just above it to cradle their baby. It made his heart warm, melting his recent troubles away. Anakin stood behind her, slipping his arms beneath hers, encircling her waist.

The following day, Padme was up and about and back to normal again. Nevertheless, she didn't report to her Senator's office, keeping the baby's health in mind. She decided to work from home, tending to meetings via holoscan.

Anakin left early, reporting to the Chancellor's office for his normal duties as liaison to the Jedi Council. This new job seemed to put him under added pressure, of which she consoled him often. It appeared that his work between the two offices were in conflict, and his loyalty to both were in question. It pained him deeply.

Padme rested on the sofa, her feet propped high as she typed away on her datapad. The doorbell rang. She stood, and waddled toward the door, still dressed in her sleeping gown. She tied her robe, cinching it at the collar then pressed the security code Threepio had given her.

The door slid open.

"My lady!" Dorme smiled. "I'm glad to see you are well. Anakin—" she blushed, realizing she called him by his first name... "Master Skywalker told me you had taken ill."

Padme took Dorme's hands in hers, a warm smile spread across her gentle face. "Yes, about that. Sorry to have ruined our dinner. And thank you for helping me. The last thing I remember... we were talking and suddenly everything went blank."

"Glad to have been a help. And thank you for inviting me over once again." Dorme extended a linen bag, which was full of bollop fruits from her father's cart.

"Thank you, Dorme. I'll ask Threepio to slice them for us."

"Oh, none for me," Dorme smiled. "These are from my father's cart. I eat them so often I can barely stand to look at them."

Padme gestured, directing her friend to the sofa. The two women sat and chatted about sewing pillows, the travails of the Senate, and Chancellor Palpatine's rise to power. Suddenly, Dorme laid a hand on Padme's lap.

"My lady... remember that conversation we had a few days ago? When you asked if I would be godmother to yours and Master Skywalker's child?"

"Of course," Padme gasped. "I was very sincere, and happy that you accepted."

Dorme looked down, her hands tracing a pattern on Padme's sofa. "Would you do the same for me?" she asked, peering through her lashes at the senator.

"What do you mean?"

"My lady... I have just learned that I am very recently pregnant."

The surprise on Padme's face was heartfelt. But then, hadn't Dorme told her only five days before that she had no husband or plans to marry?

Dorme blushed and suppressed a giggle. She made a face that Padme remembered from their youth. A face she made when she was lying. Suddenly, Padme felt very uneasy.

"You know I would. I suppose you'll get married soon. I wish you a happy and lavish wedding. One that your friends could attend, unlike my wedding to Anakin. As beautiful as it was, I couldn't celebrate it openly, as much as I would have liked to."

"Oh, but it is to be a secret, my lady."

"Why?" Padme asked, a look of polite curiosity plastered on her face.

Dorme blushed again. "I can't say, but I will tell you in time."

"Very well, then. Let us share a celebratory drink."

"My lady!" a panicked voice called from the other side of the room. It was Threepio. Padme had a feeling he was spying on their conversation. His appearance was too timely to be a coincidence. Unbeknownst to Padme, Threepio, put himself on standby the moment Dorme walked in. "I'm afraid we have no refreshment available for your guest."

"Really? How odd, Threepio. Why not?"

"You were sick, and to be honest Master Skywalker would know little about going to the market or what drinks to bring into the house."

"You're right, Threepio. I'm sorry Dorme. I have nothing to offer you. I'm so embarrassed."

Dorme smiled. "Don't worry, my lady."

Threepio walked toward the bedrooms again, nearly stubbing his gold colored chrome foot on a coffee table. "I'll be here... nearby... my lady," Threepio said, looking over his shoulder at both Padme and Dorme.

"Your droid is very well mannered. My father recently acquired one and he's been nothing but trouble. He flitters and jumps around the house. He nearly set it ablaze once. I wonder if a droid is worth having around, when there's a baby in the house."

"You think Threepio might be dangerous?"

Dorme shrugged. "My mother would never have a droid around when there's a baby nearby. They mean well, but accidents happen."

"I should give it great thought," Padme replied.

Threepio nearly blew a fuse, hearing Dorme say such awful things. He turned the corner, quietly listening. It didn't matter anyway. Dorme would soon be gone. Master Skywalker was due back to the apartment very soon.

The women chatted and sewed pillows for the rest of the afternoon. It was such a shame. Padme really seemed to enjoy Dorme's company.

A few hours after the "drink" incident, Padme called Threepio to the room and asked him to slice some of Dorme's fruit. Upon his return to the room, he 'tripped', squashing the slices with his heavy metal feet. Like Dorme said... "accidents happen."

The women were disappointed, Dorme moreso. Her plan to put his mistress to sleep again had yet been foiled.

When the sky turned purple and orange, Threepio was grateful to see the door slid open and Anakin Skywalker walk inside. Taking care of the senator was hard work. It seemed the only way to keep her safe was to stand on guard continuously.

Padme and Dorme stood, both with the pillows they decorated in hand.

"Anakin, I'm so glad you're home." Padme walked across the room and pulled him into an embrace. He looked over her shoulder at Dorme, whose hands were folded before her innocently. The pillow she had moments ago had been tossed aside.

He approached, Padme's arm encircling the back of his waist.

"Good evening, Master Skywalker." Dorme curtseyed, a thin smile across her lips.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

Padme gave her friend a helpless look.

"I invited her," Padme replied. "Anakin... *please*, don't be rude. I'm sorry, Dorme, he's really tired."

Padme rubbed his shoulder consolingly, but Anakin pulled away.

"Perhaps I should leave."

"I'm sorry..." Padme whispered.

"It's fine. I have a doctor's appointment tomorrow. The little one's first appointment..."

Anakin smacked his lips derisively as Padme walked Dorme to the door. When it closed, Padme turned, hands on her hips.

"Anakin! What's gotten into you?"

"I don't want her here anymore," he griped.

"Dorme is my friend. I invited her over and it's been a good day. We have so much in common now. Dorme is recently pregnant."

"But she's lying," Anakin replied in a pleading tone.

"How do you know?"

"I sensed it. Besides... She said she didn't have a husband or any plans to marry. It's been five days and she's suddenly pregnant?"

"I agree. The story does sound a bit... forced."

"More than forced."

Anakin strode across the room and pulled Padme into his arms. "I'm sorry if I've upset you."

Padme rubbed Anakin's chest, her hand adjusting his tunic. "There's only one way to make it up to me," she whispered in a tiny voice.

Padme pulled Anakin by the hand and led him to the sofa. She sat on his lap, draping her arm behind his back casually.

"Not tonight," he said. Two nights in a row, he had turned her away. Anakin decided not to make love to Padme. Not while there were lies between them.

"Did I do something wrong?"

"No, of course not, my love."

"Is it the way I look?"

Anakin smiled. "You're beautiful..."

"Then what is it?"

Anakin laid his head on her shoulder, looking away.

The Dorme saga ends next chapter... — CG

34. An Affair Exposed

Padme and Anakin sat quietly for a moment entwined in each other's arms. Padme ran her fingers through his hair, letting the curls bounce and weave between her fingers.

Anakin caressed her arms. "I hope you never invite Dorme here again."

Padme laid her head against his. "I won't. If you promise to forgive me for having invited her to dinner tonight."

An iron grip fell around Padme's shoulders.

"You invited her to dinner?" he said in a deadened voice.

"It was before I knew she bothered you so much."

Anakin sighed. "Cancel it."

"I can't. I wanted to make things up for what happened the other night. You don't understand, Ani. With Dorme, I don't have to hide how I feel for you. It feels good not having to deceive someone I care about."

"You regret being married to me."

Anakin gave her a disappointed look. He slid Padme from his lap and left the couch. Padme squirmed until her body was in a position to rise from the depression he left. She waddled after him. He seemed... like "angry Anakin" again. He was becoming more and more uneasy, the longer he worked for Palpatine. They both had friends the other didn't like.

"I don't regret being married to you, how could you say such a thing?" Padme called. "What about Palpatine? He makes me uncomfortable and yet you continue to befriend him. And ever since you started working for his office, you've been miserable. You haven't been sleeping, you've been upset and sometimes... you yell at me when I told you how much I dislike it."

Anakin walked to the bedroom. Padme followed. Anakin pulled her inside, his arms around her waist.

"I don't want to fight—"

"Neither do I," Padme said. "Like all marriages, it takes work. We love each other so much, sometimes it hurts us more than it helps us."

"I've been irritable Padme... because—"

"Not that again. Not the dreams. I'm not going to die in child birth. You're irritable because you haven't been asleep. You haven't even been to our bed."

"I'm sorry," he said, rubbing her arm.

"Anakin, the dreams might have something to do with my being comatose the past few days. Could that be it? The danger has now passed. I'm still here."

He turned his face away, but Padme pressed her fingers into his cheeks, forcing him to turn and look at her again. She stood on her toes and kissed his lips. "Dorme will be back tonight. If it upsets you, I won't invite her again. But please... do your best to make it through."

"Fine," he grimly replied.

Padme pressed a pair of earrings into her ear, wondering if there was a kinder way to tell Dorme that all future plans were off. She couldn't understand Anakin's dislike of her friend and wondered if there was something he wasn't telling her.

Anakin paced the veranda like he always did he was troubled. But the trouble he fretted over was much bigger than Dorme. He was upset over many things... for one he claimed the Jedi Council didn't trust him. Her reply was that they may have sensed his deception without directly pinpointing what the deception might be — that it was his marriage to her, which went against the tenets of their religion that was hurting him and he would have to choose one or the other eventually. Which really amounted to more stress.

From what Padme gleaned from overheard conversations was that, Palpatine had asked him to spy on the Jedi and the Jedi had asked him to spy on Palpatine. Neither office trusted each other and Anakin was caught in the middle. Dorme was merely a pin in his side that he needed to be rid of. And she would oblige her husband if it would help him feel better. Anything to help him feel better...

The door bell rang. Padme seemed to float from her bedroom to answer. Anakin was not much company. He was altogether miserable and she needed relax.

The door slid open and Dorme was on the other side in a breathtaking strapless chiffon gown. "Dorme... you're beautiful!" Padme exclaimed.

The former handmaiden beamed, a look of condescension in her eyes as they fell to Padme's modest evening attire and full belly.

"Thank you, my lady..." Dorme replied. She strode to the sofa, slipping out of the matching scarf she wore about her shoulders. Her earrings twinkled in the dim light. "Will Anakin be joining us?" She asked as though she was there to have dinner with him and not Padme.

"I'll have to find out," Padme replied, slightly thrown off.

"Well, run along, my lady. We don't want to waste another evening."

A hurt look crept into Padme's eyes. She wasn't sure if she misheard Dorme, or if she were feeling a bit insecure, looking at someone so slim, when she felt so fat and pregnant.

"I'll talk to Anakin, please, feel free to have a drink. Threepio should be out soon."

Dorme gave her a bored smile.

Tonight was the night. Her plotting and planning would finally pay off. Padme was going to know the truth about *her* relationship with Anakin Skywalker. That they were going to be together and Padme would be the one left out in the cold.

Padme walked to the bedroom, her heart suddenly very heavy. Dorme's behavior was strange. Anakin's behavior towards her was strange, their behaviors combined was painting a very ugly picture.

She opened the bedroom door then closed it behind her. Anakin sat on the bed, his chin resting in both of his hands.

He stood, sensing something was wrong with Padme.

"Are you okay?" he asked.

Padme gave him a hurt look. "Are you and Dorme... having *an affair*?"

His eyes opened as wide as she had ever seen them. He walked across the room, flesh hand punching into the palm of his black gloved mechanical palm.

"There's something I need to tell you," he said, sounding grave.

"Are you and Dorme having an affair?" she repeated.

"Of course not!"

Padme followed him with her eyes. "Then why are the both of you acting so strange? Why is Dorme acting so... superior to me? Or as though she knows something I don't."

"I was going to tell you... but I didn't know how."

"Tell me what?" Padme gasped. "What are you not telling me?"

"Dorme... is the reason you were sick. She put a spice in your drink."

"That's a lie!"

"You don't trust me? Nobody trusts me, apparently. Why would I lie?"

Padme shook her head. "It's too incredible to believe... Dorme and I have been friends since childhood."

"And were we not childhood friends?"

Tears collected at the corner of Padme's eye. She slowly drifted away from Anakin "So I was in a coma... because of Dorme?" She turned and looked at him. And suddenly, he was no longer angry, but empathetic. He knew all too well how it felt to be betrayed by someone he trusted.

Padme had always gotten the sense that Dorme was jealous of her. But this?

"Why? Why would she do it?"

This time, Anakin looked down. "Because of me."

"You?" Was he in on it?

"That night, Dorme confessed to being in love with me since the day I arrived with Master Obi Wan to investigate the assassination plot against you."

He walked toward Padme and took her hands in his, holding them tightly. "Promise... you won't be angry? That you'll understand what I'm about to tell you."

Padme nodded, face worried. "That night, I was in our bed, waiting for you with the lights off. Just as you had left me. I was asleep when Dorme slithered into the bed undressed. When I realized it wasn't you, I pushed her away."

"Did you — did she..." a sob left Padme's lips. She turned, pacing the room frantically.

"No— Padme I... stopped it right away. It's not my fault. I was violated. I promise... I didn't enjoy it. I felt so ashamed..." he said, voice dropping an octave. There was an unmistakable look of agony in his eyes.

Padme's shoulder's rose — her demeanor suddenly stronger. She turned and stalked out of the bedroom, Anakin on her heels. "Please forgive me, Padme," he called.

She marched to the living room, where Dorme waited. The handmaiden stood. Her eyes skipped over Padme, a seductive smile playing on her lips at the sight of Anakin.

But Padme stepped directly before her and gave her a slap that could be heard on the other side of the galaxy. Dorme gasped, a red bruise forming on her cheek. The confident height of her shoulders fell, and the smug little grin on her face — had been completely erased.

Dorme looked down, shoulders heaving.

Hell yes, Anakin thought.

Dorme's eyes rose to Padme's face, a tearful look of contrition within them. A hand lifted to soothe her stung cheek and a glorious, sparkling tear trickled out of the corner of her eye.

It was over. Just like that. Over.

Finally, stomach churning, Dorme found the courage to speak. "I'm so ashamed..." she gasped, tears streaming down her painted cheeks.

"You should be."

Padme didn't have to tell her to get out. Dorme had already started a slow migration toward the door.

Normally the couple kept Threepio out of the room when serious matters were being addressed. But Master Skywalker and Senator Amidala were so distracted, they didn't notice him standing there, refreshments in hand. *Well, that was exciting*, Threepio thought.

Dorme shook uncontrollably, her head tilted ever slightly. Their eyes assailed her, heightening her shame. The little droid walked toward her.

"Allow me," Threepio said, sliding the door open. Dorme walked out, shoulders hunched as though someone had taken a heavy object and blunted her over the head.

The door closed and Padme turned, an angry look in her eyes. "You should have told me from the very beginning what Dorme had been up to."

"I'm sorry, my love. Can you ever forgive me?"

"Forgive you? It wasn't your fault." Padme pulled him into her arms, erasing the pain and stress of the past week. It all fell away, like a layer of heavy white snow from a mountain top.

35. The Workout

The conclusion to the “Dorme Saga” was in the previous chapter in case you missed it. This chapter is not for younger readers — CG

The soft glow of a candle’s flicker filled Anakin’s and Padme’s bedroom with hazy light. Padme sat with her legs curled beneath her, reminiscent of Dorme only nights before. Anakin pushed the thought from his mind. That was over now. Thanks to his precious Padme.

Padme sipped from an oblong stem of cider, while Anakin opted for something more potent. He promised himself, he wouldn’t drink as much as Obi Wan — ever.

Their arms entwined as they took yet another sip from the glasses like they had seen couples do on those awful holonet programs. They exploded in a fit of giggles.

“See? We’re the best friends we could ever have.”

“Indeed. Although, I find it a bit sad that we can’t have friends like normal couples... at least none who would try exploit our ‘situation’,” Padme replied.

“Everyone in the Republic are becoming more treacherous with each passing day.”

“Even the children?”

Anakin looked down, swirling the contents of his glass. “Some.” His eyes darkened.

“Not our baby...” Padme replied, leaning toward him for a kiss.

His lips pressed against hers longer than she expected, his breathing almost erratic when they parted.

“Where will we live when the baby is born?”

“I don’t know... maybe Alderaan or Hoth.”

“Hoth? Are you crazy? The noses on that planet are way too big.”

Anakin smiled. “What do you mean? You’ve never even been to Hoth.”

“The air is too cold. You want a child with a big nose?”

“That’s only a myth.”

“I’m not taking any chances,” Padme replied.

She moved to Anakin’s side of the bed, snuggling in his arms. “I will go to Aeeq.”

Aeeq was an ocean covered planet close to Naboo with cities and land masses that float on top of bodies of water. Anakin gave her a skeptical look.

“What if an asteroid penetrated the atmosphere and sank us?”

Padme laughed, pinching him softly. "Don't be silly."

"I'm not being silly, I worry about you and the baby everyday."

"You worry too much."

"I have to protect you," he said, finishing his glass of spice rum. Anakin kissed her forehead, his alcohol tinged breath made Padme cringe and laugh quietly to herself.

He reached into a bowl of fruit then pressed one into his mouth, a sarcastic look on his face. Did she forget how easily he could sense her thoughts?

"Who do you think the baby will look like?" Padme beamed.

"Uh... I don't know. Viceroy Gunray?"

"I'll kill you!" Padme turned and faced him. Her fists bounced off of Anakin's muscular pecs. He flexed them up and down for her amusement, then grabbed her flailing hands.

Anakin's idea of humor was to behave in what Padme often described as "pernicious". The victims of his wry sense of humor evolved quite naturally, from Obi Wan to his rueful wife.

"That won't get you anywhere. Let me teach you a defensive tactic..."

"Get up, Anakin before you crush the baby."

He shrugged, then mumbled an apology about forgetting. "Okay, someone is holding you down, take your elbow and jab him in the neck like this... That'll stop the attacker from breathing for about... five seconds, long enough to grab his throat and try to catch his breath."

"Oh Anakin everyone knows about that," said Padme mockingly.

"Really? Then what do you do next?"

Padme looked around, trying to think of something to say.

"There isn't anything to do next, but get the hell out of there." He kissed her nose and did push ups over her body. He was bored, and Padme was great to tease and have fun with. Whenever his body pressed closer to hers, she tried pushing him back up. He kept his stomach rounded back, to keep from crushing her belly, which was like a small round ball. This enabled him on every other push up to steal a kiss.

"How long am I to be tortured?" Padme droned.

Anakin stopped, catching his breathing for ten seconds, a thoughtful look on his face... "Uhh... I don't know Padme. Until I'm done with my workout (doing push ups again with an arm tied behind his back), or until you find a way to entertain me."

A fine coat of sweat formed on his chest and trickled down to his abs.

"You must have been an awful boy," Padme griped.

"No more awful than other boys or padawans."

"Was Obi Wan as awful as you? I bet he was the perfect padawan."

"Let him tell it, he probably was. But I've heard differently from both Master Windu and Master Yoda (switching push up arms). In fact (grunting), Obi Wan was once expelled from the Order when he was only thirteen for disobeying orders and challenging Master Qui Gonn to a saber match."

"You lie. You are still awful, Anakin Skywalker," Padme teased. She pressed her open palms against his chest in a second, but futile attempt to push him away.

"You think Obi Wan is perfect? He's not."

"No one is perfect. Or so near to perfection as you are, my love."

Anakin slowed in his push ups, bringing his lips close to hers. He lingered before planting a kiss. Then lifted, doing several more push ups... "Only 500 more to go..." he grunted.

"Anakin! I am not to be teased like this... How would you like if I did push ups over you?"

He paused, giving her a sly grin before continuing. "I would love it... don't think the baby would like it so much."

Padme sighed, realizing she'd have to play as dirty as Anakin to get out of the situation she was in. Her hands slowly drifted down her sides as she slowly drew her gown up and over her waist. Anakin, realizing what she had done, paused in his workout, a defeated look on his face. He panted, out of breath as he leaned over her thinking how easy these push ups might have been to continue without the baby to worry about.

"You win," he said in a defeated voice.

Anakin sat up, legs folded beneath him as he pulled her legs around his body. He peeled his pants down from his waist then let his hand slide beneath her as he pulled her even closer. A desirous gaze filled his eyes. Padme thought about how easily carried away Anakin could get, and stopped him from moving forward with a foot to his chest.

"Don't hurt the baby," she said... her usual warning prior to making love.

"I never do," he replied, whispered gently.

36. To save her

The Jedi Temple hummed with activity. But it wasn't the usual traffic that flooded the temple's halls... These pedestrians were children and padawans who were too young to fight in the raging battle of the Clone Wars — which was depleting the Jedi forces with shocking alacrity. Anakin raced by them to the Jedi Control Tower, where the Jedi Council awaited his next report. He was late. It almost seemed as though the chancellor held him up just to tick the masters off. Anakin was tired of being caught in the middle of their political jousting. A month or two ago he was a decorated hero of the clone wars. But now, he was just a sad memory of himself, a pawn... and it was wearing on him... wearing on him heavily. Compounding his problems were the intensifying nightmares of Padme dying in childbirth. And it seemed the only way to avoid the nightmares was to avoid sleep altogether. So he was tired too. And hungry.

His eyes sagged.

Anakin entered the meeting, met by Master Windu's cavalier attitude about his being late again. Anakin made his apologies then sat beside the blue holopresence of Master Plo Koon. He usually sat by Obi Wan. But Obi Wan was on Utapau, confronting General Grievous.

"It's been confirmed. General Grievous has been destroyed," Mace said.

There was an outburst of murmuring in the room. The blue holopresence of Yoda spoke:

"Good news this is. Confront the chancellor we must. Ask him, we will to concede power to the Senate and restore the Republic to its former glory."

Anakin sighed. Here they are with that again. Was it not the chancellor who told them where Grievous was? Is this the thanks he was to get? Could he not rejoice in the end of the war before the council were pouncing on him?

Master Windu turned to Anakin, as though sensing his reluctance. Without comment on them, he spoke...

"Anakin, take note. Tell the chancellor that General Grievous has been destroyed and that the war is over. He is to return full power to the senate, ending his reign."

And that's for you to decide? Anakin opened his mouth, but said nothing. What Master Windu spoke sounded suspiciously like politics to him. And the Jedi weren't politicians. They were keepers of the peace. So what was Master Windu talking about?

"Watch the chancellor closely... see his reaction to this news, and report them to us when you're done."

"Yes, Master Windu."

Anakin stalked out of the meeting, heading straight to his speeder to carry out Master Windu's orders. His order to spy on the chancellor... the order to commit treason, *the order to betray his friend.*

He closed the top of his speeder with a sigh, an ominous feeling overcoming him. A dread clanged at the bottom of his heart like a bean in an empty metal tank. The speeder lifted. Anakin flew top speed to the Senate Hall. He flew past Padme's balcony, knowing she was inside, knowing she was there, waiting on him.

Some minutes later, Anakin strode down the hall and into the chancellor's office past the redrobes as he had always done. They never stopped him. When it came to Anakin, the chancellor had an open door policy.

The leader sat behind his desk, chair facing the big window behind him as he gazed onto the busy Coruscant sky. Off in the distance stars exploded and rocketed through the atmosphere, incinerating into plumes of smoke. Only, these weren't stars. They were ships destroyed in the raging battle over their planet. Droid and Clones alike.

"You see that Anakin? The beauty of it... the magnificence?" Palpatine inhaled, as though smelling a bed of marsh flowers. "Invigorating isn't it?"

"What, sir?"

"Smoke... the smell of fire and burning flesh. The smell of defeat in the air..."

Palpatine spun his chair around in a dramatic flourish, an hand motioning toward Anakin. "Please... sit my boy... what can I do for you?" He smiled, a benign look upon his face.

How could the Council think this man unworthy of being Chancellor? Unworthy of staying in office?

"The Council has sent a message. General Grievous has been destroyed. They say the war is over."

A frown creased the old man's eyebrows. "I suppose the Council have asked you to note my reaction to this news, haven't they?"

"Well — sir, I'm not liberty to say."

"You don't have to Anakin. It's all over your face."

Anakin's eyes dropped to his lap. Palpatine stood. "They want me to end my reign as chancellor don't they? I warned you Anakin... that this was coming. And I fear that time is upon us my son."

"What time?"

Anakin followed the chancellor with his eyes as he circled his desk to sit in front of him on the very edge.

"The Jedi are planning to overthrow the Republic."

"I told you, Chancellor Palpatine, the Jedi would never—"

"You're wrong, Anakin. Word has come back — that if I don't leave office in the time frame that is demanded of me by the council, they will use force. They're planning to execute me. There are also talks of overthrowing the senate. They know I have friends there, friends who are happy with my service and wish me to remain in office. Please... Anakin. Say you

are not a part of this ugly conspiracy. That you will stand beside the Republic. I know they're your brothers, but what they're doing is wrong."

"If it were true... I—I," Anakin stuttered.

"You don't have to answer me now. I know you will do the right thing, eventually. You always have. You know what I tell you is the truth, you've been a victim of their dishonesty. They don't trust you, Anakin because they know you are good. And it's unfair. They've kept you out of their deceptive plans because they know you will get in the way of their plans. That's why they fear you, son. But alas... you're a Jedi. And a very loyal one. I don't wish you to be dissuaded by your superiors to become a part of their evil plans. What can I do... to keep you on the side of the Republic?"

"I'm already on the side of the Republic. As are the Jedi."

Palpatine stood. His eyes read Anakin, reflecting the gaze of a man who looked upon a naive child.

"I need your help, Anakin..." The chancellor's eyes had gone soft. "There must be something I can give you, to save the Republic from treachery. Name it, anything your heart desires."

Anakin blinked. "Anything I want?"

"Yes... you've been denied long enough. The Jedi never allowed you to have anything, did they? Nothing but the clothes upon your back. Anything you want, Anakin."

"Are you serious?"

"As serious as I have ever been. I've not been a man of games before, so why now? Name something. It's yours."

Anakin looked thoughtful for a second. "A 459 class Z speeder," he said. Anakin didn't want it, he simply wanted to test the chancellor's reaction.

"Done."

Anakin looked stunned for a moment. "But they're very expensi—"

"I said anything you want, Anakin. Name it, go on, have fun." A look of casual malice entered Palpatine's gaze then disappeared.

"A villa on Aeeq. Near the ocean," he replied, thinking of Padme's dream house.

"Done. When would you like to move in?"

"Just like that?"

"Bigger, Anakin. Think big. Not of cars, not of houses, but of systems."

This time, Anakin gave him a look of complete doubt. Nobody had ever asked him what he wanted before. Well... not since Qui Gonn asked if he wanted to become a Jedi.

"Naboo. I want Aeeq and Naboo."

"Yours! Remember what I told you at the opera? All those who have power, are afraid of losing it. That's why they held you back. Denied your mastery. And you needed to become a master, in order to save Padme, didn't you? I can help you, Anakin. I can help you save the one you love. I can give you **anything** your heart desires—"

Anakin was suddenly on his feet. He didn't feel himself rise, he just did. He moved across the room, closer to the door. "How did you..."

"I'm from Naboo, Anakin. I have many connections. Did you think your wedding records wouldn't come across my desk?"

Palpatine circled him, like a animal about its prey.

"Stand by me, and I will help you save her."

Anakin's heart beat so fast in his chest, he couldn't breathe. He grabbed a nearby stand to steady himself. How did Palpatine know the secrets of his heart? That Padme's life was worth more than any speeder, house, or system.

Anakin gave him a confused look. "But how?"

Palpatine lurched, a predatory smile across his lips... "Become my apprentice. Only through the path of the darkside, can you learn the secrets of saving your wife."

"How do you know the ways of the dark side?"

"I was Darth Plagueis' pupil," he thundered. A veil of malice fell upon his face.

Suddenly, a ray of blue plasma appeared before them, blazing in a fury of ion heat. "You're the Sith Lord?" Anakin nearly collapsed... *The Republic was corrupt from the inside out.* The Jedi wanting to overthrow the senate, and Palpatine a Sith master?

"Don't be so shocked. I'm not the only one who kept secrets."

Palpatine was the cause of this destruction? This madness that took the lives of so many people? The threat that was tearing the Jedi Order asunder? The one who kept him away from Padme for so many months?

"You want to strike me down don't you?" Palpatine closed his eyes. "I know Anakin, I can feel your power... I can feel it surging through every cell of your body."

Anakin bit his lip, it took every ounce of Jedi restraint to hold him back. But he couldn't kill the chancellor without being arrested for murder. Without proof. This needed to be brought before the council and the senate. They would need to indict him.

Anakin lowered his lightsaber.

"Remember... I'm the only one who can save Padme. I'm your only hope." Palpatine's lips popped... **hope**.

Anakin turned and spun on his heels, walking out of the office.

37. Run

Everything suddenly made sense... this whole war. Obi Wan told him to search his feelings and that something was not right with the chancellor. But the chancellor was his friend. The one person he could talk to about *anything*. Who were they to decide he was evil? Who were the Jedi to decide that Palpatine should be executed over a philosophical difference?

Anakin docked his speeder on the Jedi landing dock and ran inside. His legs were shaky and buckled when he touched the elevator. They didn't want him to kill his friend? They couldn't ask him to do it...

And Padme... how would he save Padme if Palpatine were dead?

Anakin entered the control room where Master Windu waited .

“Master Windu,” he panted, his voice as heavy as lead... “It’s—” Anakin fell over, leaning against the Master. Mace Windu held him up, a look of concern on his face. He searched Anakin’s eyes.

“What’s wrong? Can you speak?”

“Master... Master Windu... it was him—— he, Palpatine—”

“Center yourself, Anakin, breathe... meditate.”

Anakin panted, steadyng himself at last, though still unable to control his quivering hands.

“Palpatine is the Sith Lord we were looking for.”

Master Windu’s stomach rolled, awash with feelings of dread. “Are you sure?”

“He confessed!” Anakin was near tears but didn’t know why he was crying. Was it Palpatine’s betrayal? Or was it the fact that the Palpatine might die, taking the secret to save Padme with him?

“Then our worse fears have been realized. I will deal with the chancellor. You will go upstairs and wait for us.”

“But, Master—”

“If you wish to earn my trust, then you will stay here.”

Windu laid consoling hands on Anakin’s shoulders.

“Yes, master.”

Anakin turned on his heels, wondering how they would arrest the chancellor without the chosen one. He went upstairs to the Room of a Thousand Fountains and waited as instructed. Seconds were like minutes, minutes were like hours, and hours like days. They were going to kill the chancellor... he could feel it. Anakin stood on the balcony and gazed at blazing Coruscant skies and felt somewhere out in the distance, that Padme too, stood and gazed as

she watched for his ship. A ship that would never come. Their love leapt and bound, overcoming time and distance to unite them in spirit. He could almost smell her in the air.

Padme had once asked him... if he had to choose between her and the Order, what *would he* choose? The answer had eluded him since the day they married, but now that answer was clearer to him than ever. Master Windu said, if he wished to earn his trust... why care about an order that didn't trust him anyway? Did they not think of him as a brother?

To Padme, there was no "if". **He was.** He was her husband and the father of her child. Anakin turned, suddenly not caring that he disobeyed a direct order anymore. He ran from the Room of a Thousand Fountains as fast as he could to the top of the Jedi Temple where his speeder waited.

The speeder raced across Coruscant, toward Senate Hall. He landed his ship on the landing bay nearest to the chancellor's office and leapt out, without even a hint of consideration for where he even landed the ship. Already his lightsaber was in hand. His heart pounded and his legs carried him faster than he had ever run. He could only think of what they were doing to his friend.

Anakin pushed the door the Chancellor's office open, finding a pile of bodies blocking the way. Two of those bodies were headless, one belonging to his friend Kit Fisto. Anakin's heart filled with ever deepening dread. He looked around but could not find the chancellor or Master Windu. Until he heard the distant whirring sound of lightsabers clashing.

He raced toward that sound. A few offices down, the Master and the Sith Lord battled in a window. The ever powerful Master Windu stood over a cringing Chancellor Palpatine.

"You have lost, my lord," Windu was saying.

The chancellor, having already sensed Anakin, turned and looked at the Jedi. "Anakin! Save me. I told you they were conspiring to kill me."

Anakin turned and looked at Mace Windu, who had raised his lightsaber over his head. "He must be destroyed."

"You can't!" Anakin cried. "You must take him before the courts..." *he must live, to save Padme*, he wanted to finish.

"He owns the Senate and the Courts. They'll never prosecute him. He was behind the war—everything. Anakin, the chancellor must be destroyed!"

Suddenly, a blast of Sith Lightening shot out of the chancellor's wrinkled old hands. Master Windu deflected the bolts. This was Anakin's time. When the chosen one would fulfill his destiny, Mace decided.

"Anakin, you must destroy him."

The lightening deflecting back onto the chancellor had begun to melt his face, deforming him, revealing a rotting, corrupt old man. Palpatine's true face. And it was ever fitting as he shot lightening from his hands. Somehow, Mace sensed, the Chancellor didn't seem as afraid of Anakin as he should have been... dare he think it, the chancellor trusted Anakin to be on his side.

"I can save the one you love," the chancellor cackled. "I can save Padme..."

“—what?” Mace said. Save Padme? Why would Anakin...

Anakin looked at Mace, and suddenly the master knew... there was a reason why he couldn't bring himself to trust Anakin. Their fates were tied to this very moment. That Anakin didn't know whose side he was on.

“I can save your wife, Anakin! Save me!”

How can he save Padme, when he can't even save himself, Anakin wondered. He looked to Master Windu, then to Palpatine... and again back and forth to the two men.

“I'm too weak!” Palpatine cried. The old man slumped and the lightening began to fizz.

“Anakin?” Mace Windu said, turning his blade to deflect the weakening bolts.

Anakin closed his eyes and his lightsaber came up. He decided he would let the force guide his decision, guide his blade. The truth was, *he couldn't choose*. His friend and his wife needed him. The Jedi Master on the other hand, never wanted him to begin with.

The blue lightsaber came slashing down with vicious ferocity and the lightening fizzled. Anakin sank to the ground. There was no saving Padme... The chancellor was dead and she was going to die.

He felt the heat of Master Windu's lightsaber blazing near his face. He looked up, meeting the master's eyes... “What have I done?” Anakin cried.

“You did what you were chosen to do,” Mace replied.

“I killed a friend!”

“Yes...” Mace replied, eyes dead. “And that friend has revealed something about you, that was not previously known to myself, or the Council. Stand! You are coming with me.”

“What?”

Anakin slowly collected himself, rising to his feet. Master Windu pointed the lightsaber at his neck.

“What are you doing?” Anakin asked.

“I'm taking you before the council. To decide your fate.”

“My fate?”

“You've violated the tenets of your oath. And must stand trial for treason against the Order.”

“Treason? Master Windu what are you talking about?”

“You were friends with the Sith Lord. We can't be sure that you were not a part of his plan.”

“I destroyed the Chancellor, he was my friend but i had no part of his planning.”

“And what about your wife?”

Anakin felt as though he had been pushed out of the window.

"How can you serve the Order, when you are married? And everyone knows the senator is pregnant, and now... it can be no secret that you are the one who fathered her child. You have shown yourself to be untrustworthy in every sense of the word. It was you who discovered that the chancellor was a Sith Lord. We don't know how long you have known, and therefore you are to be treated as an accomplice until otherwise vindicated. Democracy will be restored to the Republic, and all those who oppose it, will perish."

He pointed the lightsaber at Anakin's chest. But Anakin pulled back and withdrew his own.

"What are you doing?" Mace asked.

"I'm not going with you."

"Turn yourself in!" Mace said, wind from the blown out window blew his dark cape behind him. "You must be stopped!"

Anakin whirled his lightsaber around, meeting Master Windu's. The Master jumped back, deflecting the blow.

But Anakin had no wish to kill him, he turned and ran as fast as he could. Mace Windu took after him, calling for the Jedi to turn himself in. Anakin slipped into a nearby office then ran out onto the balcony. He scaled the side of the building to the landing bay where his speeder waited. Somewhere inside of the complex, Mace Windu searched for him.

Anakin landed the speeder on Padme's veranda moments after leaving the Senate Hall. He leapt out of the ship and raced inside.

"Padme?" he called in a panicked voice.

Threepio came tottering out of one of the rooms, looking, as nosily about as Anakin came running through the apartment toward the bedroom.

Padme laid in bed, sleeping peacefully, having exhausted herself with worry. He sat on the bed and shook her awake, his hands rough on her arms.

She turned and looked at him, then jolted upright to throw her hands around his neck. "Anakin, I was worried senseless... I'm so glad you came back to me."

A tear streamed out of the corner of her eye.

"Padme, get your things, we have to leave."

"Leave? What do you mean?"

"The Jedi are plotting to kill me."

"The Jedi— they wouldn't," she gasped.

"Tonight I learned a terrible truth about chancellor Palpatine. He's the Sith Lord the Jedi had been looking for. He was behind everything, including the war."

Padme clutched her chest.

"I killed him," Anakin said. "I killed my good friend, and now they have turned on me."

“You killed the chancellor? What about trial?”

“He was trying to kill master Windu, I was told to fulfill my destiny as the chosen one. When I did, Master Windu turned on me. They know about you. They know about the baby. He is using that, to further his suspicion that I was a part of the chancellor’s plotting.”

“Were you?” Padme said, her eyebrows gathered together in doubt.

“Of course not!” Anakin raged. “It’s bad enough they don’t trust me, and now you?”

“I’m sorry, my love...”

Anakin pulled her out of bed into his arms. They hugged. He turned and opened drawers and cabinets, while Padme fetched a suitcase. He tossed as many clothing as they could find into the bag, stuffing it until clothes spilled out.

“Credits, we’ll need credits,” Padme said.

“I don’t have any. Everything I had came from the Order.”

“I’ll take care of us,” Padme replied.

“No, I will.”

“We’ll take care of each other.”

Padme raced to him and hugged him once more. “I have credits here in the apartment. I’ve been stowing away, should something like this ever happened. What do you think they’ll do if they find us?”

“They’ll execute me. And take our baby.”

“I don’t understand.”

“I was friends with a Sith Lord. The same Sith Lord who appointed me to the council. It looks suspicious. Only I didn’t know he was a Sith Lord. And I was married to you, which divorced me from my oath to the Jedi. This could only mean, in their opinion, that I was there to spy. They know I’m powerful, and my child would be powerful indeed. They will claim her...”

Padme almost smiled, at his calling the baby ‘her’ yet again. But times were grave. She couldn’t smile if she wanted to.

38. A new life

Padme and Anakin landed on Mygeeto. A cold, frigid planet of mostly thick crystalline ice. Its people were a lemur-like race and lived in modernized highly technological cities made of ice. Padme exhaled, then watched as the very breath from her mouth turned into a mist of frozen crystals. She wore a thick linen cloak that belonged to Anakin in his early Padawan days. It was too small for him now, anyway, though too big for her. But warm enough to protect her and the baby.

"Anakin... why are we here? It's so cold," she murmured, leaning her head against his shoulder.

"It's one of few places not under control by the Jedi. It was already secured by Ki Adi Mundi and his battalion of clone troops shortly after the Chancellor died. I also chose Mygeeto because..." he smiled, 'in the language here, Mygeeto means gem. You're my gem,' he said, cupping her chin. "The people here are good. They will help us."

"What if Ki Adi comes back?"

"He won't. As long as there is stability on the planet, the council will see no reason to send him here. The Jedi are needed elsewhere. Otherwise, I will kill him if I must."

"Don't talk like that," Padme snapped. "I don't want to hear anything else about killing."

"I'm sorry my love." Anakin paused, bringing his anger to a controllable level. He held his head down, their suitcases slung over his broad shoulders. 'It wasn't supposed to be like this. I was supposed to fulfill the prophecy, then announce my retirement. Everything is wrong. Wrong, Padme.' His body slumped beneath the black cape he wore, and his head seemed to disappear behind the hood that concealed his face. "You were right. I ruined our lives."

Padme gave him a look of utter surprise. "When did I say you ruined our lives? Anakin, if I had to do it over again I would. Please, don't talk like this..." she rubbed his arm.

"When I first proposed when we were back on Naboo, you said we couldn't be together because a relationship would ruin our lives. You were right. Look at all that's happened."

"Do you regret the baby too?"

"I regret nothing. But ruining your life and career. You shouldn't be on the run here in this cold place with me."

Anakin dropped their suitcases and looked around. Padme drew close to Anakin and laid her head on his chest.

"There's no other place I'd rather be. Anakin... you think Obi Wan might help us?"

"No. Don't even mention his name. He's one of them and can't be trusted."

"But he loves you," Padme proclaimed.

"He's as loyal to the Order as anyone I have ever met. If directed by the council to turn on me, he would. Besides... the Jedi are in the process of rebuilding the Republic. They've taken over the chancellor's office, they've installed the Order's most politically astute Jedi, Ayrua Securla into office. The Senate is under their control now. I hate to say it, but Palpatine was right. The Jedi did exactly as he said they would, they have overthrown the Republic."

"The Republic was corrupt, Anakin... it needed to be done."

"It's against the tenets of the Order. Thousands of years of down a black hole.. and they talk about me! They're all hypocrites and I'm glad to be done with them. From now on, it's you, me, and the baby. That's all that matters."

"That and finding a new home," Padme replied.

"Already done. I made arrangements prior to coming here. Our house is just above that crystal enclave. It's modest, compared to what we're used to, but it will do."

"I don't care, as long as we're together."

Obi Wan stood at the center of the Room of a Thousand Fountains, pacing back and forth as the council questioned him. All of the members were there. Either in blue holopresence form, or physically present in the room. Mace Windu led the discussion while the Supreme leader of the Jedi, Master Yoda watched passively from his seat.

"You've not had any communication with Anakin Skywalker? Any idea where he might have gone?"

Obi Wan rubbed his beard. He disliked the line of questioning intensely and couldn't wait to insert some questions of his own. It seemed, Mace had already made up his mind, convicting Anakin of treason — even going so far as to accuse Anakin of being an apprentice to the Sith Lord Darth Sidious, otherwise known as Chancellor Palpatine.

"I have not spoken to Anakin since you asked me to convince him to spy on the Chancellor," Obi Wan replied, in what sounded almost like an accusatory tone. "Something, that made him feel bad, and very dishonest. If he lost his way, we have no one but ourselves to blame."

Mace Windu smacked his lips. "Yes... Master Jedi... you say these things, but you were not there to witness the reluctance with which he addressed the situation. He was fully prepared to strike me down in favor of a Sith Lord. And nearly did!"

"Nearly, is not enough to convict him. In the end, he did the right thing."

"But he is also married. I wonder, Master Kenobi, if you knew about his marriage to Senator Amidala... and that he had fathered her child?"

"I did not know about the wedding," Obi Wan replied. And that was the truth. "But I was aware, that Anakin did harbor some rather... interesting feelings for the senator."

"And you did not report it?" Kit Fisto asked.

"He was only a Padawan when those feelings were expressed to me. As far as I knew, I had taken great care in teaching him to be mindful... to repress his feelings. Apparently, he did not."

"Master Yoda, what do you think of Senator Amidala's child?" Plo Koon asked. "How do we approach this rather... *sensitive situation?*"

The little green master looked about the room... eyes squinted. Chills crawled up Obi Wan Kenobi's spine. The way the other Masters salivated over this scandal... salivated over the possibilities surrounding Anakin's child.

"Tread carefully, we must," Yoda said. "It is situation, to be handled with great care. I sense, this child is very powerful. More powerful than his father. Say it, I did not in talking to the senator, the potential of the child she carried. Emanate from her, the force did. Strong, yes, the force is with this unborn."

Yoda pointed his gimer stick. "The children, remain with their father, they must not. He is too volatile. Unsteady. Unpredictable he is."

"Are you suggesting, we take the children into our care?" Obi Wan asked.

"We've done it before. Anakin Skywalker would not be the first." *How do you think you got here? Mace Windu wanted to say. And look how that paid off.*

"With all due respect, Master Windu, Master Yoda. I don't feel it is our place to take Senator Amidala's child. Even if the father is Anakin," Obi Wan objected.

"The child was conceived while Anakin was still in the Order. Therefore, the child will come with us," said Mace.

Obi Wan shook his head, unable to digest what he was hearing.

"I recommend Obi Wan Kenobi. He will track the Skywalkers down. He knows Anakin better than all of us," Ki Adi said.

"And what if he refuses?" Obi Wan asked.

"Then you must do what you need to do. Bring him to us, dead or alive," Mace replied. "Anakin has crossed over to the dark side. I was there. I saw it, I felt the darkside emanating from him. I always have."

"I can't kill Anakin, he is like my brother," Obi Wan nearly cried.

"Put aside personal feelings you must. The boy you knew is no more. Possessed by the dark side he is. Courting the dark side he always have, including his relationship with the Chancellor."

"I won't kill him. I will convince him to come back."

"I doubt he will," Mace said. "But good luck. All in agreeance to send Obi Wan Kenobi to track Anakin Skywalker down and bring him to justice, say 'I'."

All members raised their hands.

"It is done. Meeting adjourned."

39. The Poor Family

Threepio and Artoo were having a difficult time. They weren't exactly designed to walk on slabs of ice. Much less an ice bridge several blocks long. D210 was none the better, her wheels rolling her forward, then causing her to slip back when they reached the hilly incline. Twice, Anakin left Padme's side to push the little droid ahead, a look of frustration on his face.

Gobi, a little lemur-like man, grumbled something about catching up and not having all day. Padme wondered if the native would tell them where to find fur boots, matching hat, and wool stoles similar to the one he wore over his stubby body. Gobi was Anakin's friend. A man he met many years ago when he was only a teen — a padawan under Obi Wan's care. Anakin used to sneak to Mygeeto when Obi Wan was asleep or away on business, and he and Gobi would play cards, scamming the other players, all of whom were unaware of Anakin's force sensibilities. After the game, Gobi would split their take in half between them. Anakin had won the man plenty of money — just for his own amusement, and in turn had earned Gobi's loyalty.

Padme looked on as Gobi and Anakin spoke Watto's language. Padme was saddened to see how easily Anakin could call upon the words. How fluently he spoke the language still. They stopped before a shack in what appeared to be in a not-so-good neighborhood. It was worse than where the twi-leks lived in the sub-levels of Coruscant.

Gobi turned and looked at Padme. "Welcome to yous new home."

Padme gave the man a nervous smile. "Thank you, Gobi. For helping us."

Anakin slipped to Padme's side, his hands on her shoulders. "Well, it's not like we needed any help," he countered. "But thanks nonetheless..."

"Eh EH," Gobi grunted. "I take care to keep you secret, yes?"

"Good man," Anakin replied. "Take good care, and I'll be sure to take good care of you."

The pair nodded knowingly. Padme gazed curiously at Gobi as he walked away. Anakin stood before the door of their new home, his back to her. He crumpled a fist and busted the door down. A cloud of dust rose to their faces causing poor Padme to cough excessively.

"Oh my!" Threepio exclaimed... "This... isn't our new home is it?"

Artoo: Beep boo beep boo! arrrrrrppp! (chattering)

Ignoring them, Anakin walked inside. The misfit crew reluctantly followed.

"It's not perfect," said Anakin in an overly cheerful tone. A line of chalk in the shape of a man's body marked the floor. He stood over it, hoping to hide it from Padme. "But we'll make the best of it, right?"

Padme slid into his waiting arms. "I wasn't afraid on Tatooine, and I'm not afraid now." The senator didn't sound as convinced as Threepio wanted her to.

"Master Skywalker, something appears to be staring at us."

Threepio's plates began to chatter. Anakin turned, looking around. He didn't sense anything out of the ordinary.

Threepio pointed. "There, master..."

Beneath the sofa, an eyeball stared up at them from the floor. Anakin bent down and picked it up, holding it as though it were a marble. "Nothing to worry about," he replied, stuffing it into his pocket.

Threepio met Padme's rueful gaze. "Right, my love... there's nothing to worry about. Threepio, I'm tired. You think you could do something with the place? Make it look a little... *cleaner?*"

"If I were a magician..." the droid mumbled.

Artoo opened a compartment in the trunk of his body, using one of his little arms to dust a nearby table with a ratty old cloth.

"I suppose if Artoo can do it..." Threepio mumbled, thinking how he was better off on Coruscant... heck, maybe a scrap yard would have been better than *this*.

Padme moved to sit on the sofa, but Anakin grabbed her arm, pulling her back up. "I think I might want to inspect it first." He ripped off the dust covered sheet that covered orange cushions, and something that smelled like a rotting corpse filled his nostrils. He turned to Padme, a look of nausea on his face.

Her eyebrows pressed together embarrassedly.

"My lady," Threepio called. He had dusted and cleaned a rocking chair that sat near the window to the point of looking almost new again. Anakin sighed in relief as Padme waddled over and sat, the look of exhaustion wiped from her face. She closed her eyes, already drifting into a peaceful sleep.

"Threepio," Anakin whispered. "Keep an eye on Padme."

"You're leaving us here?! But Master—"

"Threepio?" Anakin gave him a look that sent a current up the droid's spine.

"But where are you going?" he hadn't meant to ask. Who was he, but a droid, talking to the man who created him?

"To make things better," Anakin replied. "There's a blaster in the blue suitcase."

"Whatever would I need that for?" Threepio scoffed.

"Shoot first, ask questions later."

Artoo beeped in affirmation. Anakin grinned as he walked out of the door. He knew Artoo would have his back.

The sub-levels of Mygeeto were shady, even in the daytime. Anakin walked across the ice bridge, dark hood covering his head. He couldn't risk being seen in public yet. It wasn't safe. He wanted to give the Jedi time to forget him before resurfacing again. Time to see that he wasn't a threat to the republic, but a family man just trying to live an ordinary life.

Though, as the primary breadwinner, today would be the exception. Padme couldn't sleep on a filthy bug infected couch in a rodent infested dump. Their new home had to be safe and clean for the baby, who could arrive any day now. Not quite the picture he had in mind when he envisioned their happy future... and he knew it wasn't at all the idyllic picture Padme had in mind. He felt like a failure. As though he had disappointed her.

Anakin turned a corner, climbing down a stairwell that led to a sublevel-sublevel nightclub. A night club that was so busy, that they were filled to capacity in the middle of the day. In there, he couldn't be seen, his face hidden even better in the darkness of his hood due to the lack of light. All that could be seen of his face were two piercing — reddened blue eyes. Anakin strode inside, inhaling the smell of deathsticks and liquor. He hated deathsticks. They made him want to inflict death on whoever smoked them. He took another step, when suddenly a hand shot out, and pressed him in the chest, preventing him from walking further. A guard.

Anakin waved a fist at his throat. The man collapsed. Anyone who might have noticed, were already drinking again. Anakin strode over to the bar. "Where is Jacooto?" he asked the bartender.

"Who wants to know?" the man replied.

"Someone looking for work."

"He has enough workers," the bartender said in a gruff voice.

"None like me," Anakin retorted.

40. Giddy

The door to the underground cantina opened, and Anakin withdrew into his cloak. He looked at the door. Two drunkards stumbled inside, pushing and shoving each other. He sighed. *It was no one.*

The bartender who had only left him moments ago, came back, tapping him on the shoulder. Anakin shirked away, not wanting the man's hands anywhere on him. He could snap them in two if he wished.

"Jacooto will see you now."

Anakin nodded, following the bartender into a back room. The man pushed the door ajar. Inside, A humanoid woman, a wookie, and a small native man with a rough face were inside. The native sat behind the desk, leaning back, a dangerous gleam in his eyes.

"a putko laiti morko," the man said.

Anakin easily understood. He had been to the planet enough times over the years, to understand. Speaking the man's language, he replied, "I'm looking for work. How dangerous, doesn't matter."

"You wear a Jedi's robe," Jacooto replied, in kind.

"Looks are often deceiving."

"I wonder how able you are to fulfill this task I have..."

"Would I be here otherwise?"

"The separatist have abandoned a weapon cache on the Uguna moon. Six squadrons are stationed nearby to secure it. We want those weapons. And we are prepared to pay the one who retrieves them, handsomely."

Anakin crept into the house, a large bouquet of flowers in his hand. He had traveled long and far for those flowers, an excursion to an offworld flower planet after the completion of Jacooto's mission. Indeed, he had been paid well for having successfully completed the task. Jacooto told him that finding someone with enough skill to slip into the facility unnoticed was worth paying. Unfortunately, Anakin had gone anything but unnoticed. Cody, the leader of Obi Wan's clone Battalion was the first to notice him, and the first to be struck down. When Anakin was done decimating the rest of the clones — all six squadron of them, only then was he able to infiltrate the facility and steal the goods.

He didn't kill Cody because he wanted to. He killed Cody because there was a chance he might tell Obi Wan that he had been seen. He killed the rest because they tried to stop him.

Anakin gave a sigh of relief. With the money Jacooto had given him, he could buy nice things for Padme and the baby. Lots of "nice things".

Anakin looked around. All was quiet in the sleepy house... and clean. Threepio had done a bang up job. Not a speck of dust to be seen, the blankets, sheets, and even the sofa were all fresh. There might have been a washer nearby. He could smell the floral scented soap in the air.

Tomorrow, he would use some of the money to furnish the house properly. To make it as comfortable for Padme as possible... speaking of Padme, *where was she?*

Anakin walked from room to room, settling on the largest, where Padme rested in bed, blankets pulled to her neck. With a wave of his hand, the lights flickered on.

Padme sat up, blinking sleepily. She opened her arms to greet him. Anakin sat on the side of the bed, flowers in hand as he embraced her.

"Anakin? Where have you been, I've waited hours for you. Is everything okay?"

Anakin's smile was could light up up the room. "Everything is great. Wonderful, in fact."

Padme gave him a curious look. "Really? You seemed so down earlier, I thought—"

"Things change," he said. Coming here was the best thing I've ever done. There are so many... *opportunities* I wish to pursue. You, I, and the baby, we're going to be alright. We'll every thing we need."

Padme's smile was effervescent. She pulled him into her arms, holding him tightly. "I was so worried."

"Worry no more my love, I'll take good care of us. In fact, tomorrow I'll prove it — I'm taking you shopping. Buy anything you wish."

"You talk as though you walked into a wind tunnel of money."

Anakin gazed at her, eyes darkening. "Maybe I have."

Padme had seen that look before, and didn't like it. "Anakin? Did you do something?" her eyebrows pressed together with worry.

Anakin tossed the flowers across the room. "Do something? I try to make you happy, and all you can do is sit there and accuse me of doing something wrong?"

Padme shrank into the covers, pulling them to her neck again. "I'm sorry — it's just..."

"You don't trust me," he said, standing to full height.

Padme climbed out of bed. "I trust you with my life, why would I follow you to the other side of the galaxy if I didn't trust you?"

That much was true. She had to trust him to have gone to Mygeeto with nothing but the thread in their pockets.

Anakin composed himself, pulling her close. "So... what kind of opportunities are you going to 'pursue'? Where and how are making this money?" Padme asked.

"Don't ask me about my business, Padme. Not now, not ever. Things have changed. You're not a senator anymore, and I am not a Jedi."

"You talk as though you..."

"I talk as someone who only wants to protect you. And the baby."

Anakin slipped out of his cloak. He left it on the floor as he peeled out of his shirt. Muscles tightening as he tossed it some distance away. He met her eyes, then lowered his face, bringing his lips to hers. Padme reluctantly kissed him.

He caressed her cheek with the back of his hand, whispering against her lips, "Stop worrying... I promise, everything will soon be alright."

He let his hand slide down her back, caressing her softly. Meanwhile, Padme decided to do her best to free herself of worry. Anakin was right. She always thought the worse of him. He wasn't a bad man. His heart was in the right place. It was just a matter of getting him to accept that he couldn't force his way of thinking on others, nor his tactics. In time, she would teach him. If he would open his mind and listen. But that seemed more like dream than anything. The closer they were, the farther apart they seemed. The more "his", she seemed to become, the more he seemed to think he owned her. And the baby.

Padme let her hand trail down his chest, to rest at the top of his pants. She unfastened the button. Anakin smiled. "I suppose, we ought to christen our new bed."

She was in agreeance. They smiled then ripped the covers back. Anakin, ever the gentleman, gestured for her to go first. She jumped atop the cushion, knees first. And he followed, giddy as though they hadn't been fighting moments earlier. Their mouths met and they consumed each other, their tongues meshing, teeth biting each other's lips. Anakin let his fingers pry the buttons on the back of her gown apart then peeled it from her body. He then kissed her naked shoulders and let his hands slide around to cover her breast with his mechanical hand. He had learned to be gentle with the durasteel prosthetic. He found it almost amusing, how Padme never mentioned a difference between the two hands. Flesh and metal.

"Master Skywalker," a voice that sounded like Threepio called.

Anakin hung his head.

"Uh— stay out, Threepio..."

But it was too late. The little droid wandered in, stick in his hand. "Oh my, I was recharging master, when I heard terrible grunting noise, and a bit of moaning. I was worried that Senator Amidala was not okay, so I grabbed a weapon, and came running gallantly to her rescue, only, I realized—"

"Threepio!" Anakin called. "My lady and I are busy."

Anakin huddled around Padme, shielding her from the droids prying eyes.

"And if you are not out of here in the next half second, it'll take scrap hunters a millenia to find all of your parts when I'm done with you."

The sound of Threepio's "weapon" falling to the floor was the last Anakin heard of him for the night.

41. Yours, Mine

It took some time but Padme adjusted to life on the Outer Rim. It wasn't so bad. Their house was nicer now that Anakin had a job. In fact, she sometimes wondered how he managed to afford them the luxury they lived in. The little enclave had been outfitted to look as good as her old apartment. Only different, but different in a good way.

Their house overlooked a winding road and a cliff that could only be accessed by the ice bridge. Something, Anakin once told her, that could change with a swipe of his lightsaber. The neighborhood had gotten better... dare she say it, even livable... and the people were nice. *Especially* to Anakin. They bestowed him a respect unlike anything she had ever seen. Some grateful that he had taken the time to restore order to their neighborhoods. Others, because they feared him. Some treated Anakin like a godfather, occasionally bearing gifts and asking favors of him. Leaving the Jedi had not changed him. He was still in service of the overall peace and prosperity of the community, and for that, Padme loved him even more.

But... there were rumors about the relationship he had with his boss. The old lemur-like man, Jacooto. And she was worried. Apparently, the hutt was upset that Anakin had driven some of his minions out of the area. In fact, Threepio told her that he had overheard a conversation between Anakin and some of Jacooto's men. He was leaving the organization and starting his own and they were going with him.

"Master Skywalker said his organization would be greater than anything Jacooto had ever seen. He won't allow Mygeeto to degenerate into a cess pool of chaos and crime, he would bring peace to the planet... perhaps throughout the Outer Rim. It sounds like a very good plan... in fact, I feel safer already!"

Padme walked by the droid moving to the patio, datapad in hand. "That's my Anakin," she mumbled. "Always prepared to conquer that which is bigger than himself. Because he cares. That's why I love him so much."

Love? That abstract word again. Threepio searched his database.

Padme sat on a chair next to the balcony, her lips trembling. Spring on Mygeeto felt like winter months on Naboo. She leaned toward the datapad and read the latest holonet news. Suddenly, there was a sharp intake of breath and Padme clutched her chest.

"Is something wrong, my love?"

Padme spun around at the sound of Anakin's voice.

"I don't know. Holonet news is reporting that the senate has disbanded the clone army. The Jedi felt they were no longer needed as there was peace throughout the Republic."

"Apparently they've never been to Boz Pity. Or anywhere outside of Coruscant."

Padme continued reading. "Millions of disgruntled, misplaced clone troopers. All without jobs."

"Or purpose," Anakin continued.

Padme sighed. "The senate I know and love is dead." Not even Mon Mothma or Bail Organa can resurrect it now.

Anakin sat beside her in one of the chairs and kissed the back of her hand. "I know my love, but... you mustn't mourn our old lives. We're happy, and that's all that matters. Someday, you'll serve the senate again."

"With the scandal? I don't think it very likely."

Anakin caressed her face. "Whatever your heart desires, I will give to you. Anything to make you happy."

Padme leaned over the table and kissed him. "I don't need the Senate anymore. You make me happy," she replied.

Anakin stood, taking Padme by the arm to stand with him. His eyes softened as he pulled her toward the balcony to overlook the cliffs, roads, and neighboring towns. He gestured, spreading his arms wide.

"Everything you see, except that which is in the shadows in the far west, is ours."

"Ours? What do you mean?" Padme tried to hide the worry in her eyes.

He wrapped his arms around her waist, hands covering her belly. "Yours, mine, and the baby's. When we first came to Mygeeto, stripped of everything we owned, I decided we would never be that way again. I used the money Jacooto paid me and started my own organization. Nearly all of his men followed. They work for me, now."

"You mean... you've become one of the hutts?" she asked him, cautiously.

"Hutts are criminals. I'm greater than that. I'm also greater than the Jedi and senate combined. So I've also decided to pursue a career that would allow my organization to expand to planets outside of Mygeeto."

Padme rubbed his arm. "But Ani, your organization will become another Separatist movement."

"Unlike the Separatists, I'm not against the Republic. I'm sworn to protect it. And that's what I'm doing. I'm the chosen one, remember? I may not be a Jedi, but my duties have not changed."

"My love, I'll defer judgement on the matter, for now," Padme decided. "I trust you will do the right thing. You always do."

"I am doing the right thing."

All the members of the Jedi Council sat in the Room of a Thousand Fountains, each murmuring and nodding to each other as they waited for Master Yoda to speak. The little green Whim walked in, hand pressed on his gimer stick.

He sat in a chair reserved for the Supreme Chancellor of the Jedi, eyes brows pressed together until silence fell across the room.

"Master Yoda, our field Jedi have accounted for all Clone troopers but few. The rest have returned to Kamino as ordered," Mace said.

Obi Wan Kenobi drew his cloak about him, his blood suddenly run cold.

"Master Kenobi, have concerns, do you?" Yoda asked.

Obi Wan was the only master to disagree with how the clones were treated, but was unanimously out voted by his peers. Hundreds of thousands of clones, all without purpose, awaiting their own destruction on Kamino. A last sacrifice for the Republic by the brave men. But some were not too pleased about the turn of events.

"I feel, the mass termination of the clones is a situation ripe for trouble."

"Let fear, guide your decisions, have you, Obi Wan Kenobi?"

"It's not fear. But uneasiness."

"The clones were ordered by Sidious and must be destroyed," Mace replied. "It's unfortunate, but those who served the Chancellor, or fostered relationships with him, must be driven from the Republic if peace is to remain, just as we have gotten rid of the clones, the senate," Mace Windu replied.

"...and Anakin Skywalker," Obi Wan finished.

"It seems you still have concerns about our decision to expel your former apprentice, Master Kenobi. Could that be the reason why you have not captured him yet?"

"After the prophecy was fulfilled, Anakin was never seen again. He's gone into hiding."

Mace smacked his lips. "Just as well."

Kenobi leaned back in his chair. He felt like Anakin the day the council denied his mastery.

"He is still a fugitive."

"And what is his crime?"

"Coercion. Conspiracy with a Sith Lord."

"I feel we have done our former comrade a horrible injustice. If I find Anakin, I will fulfill my duty just as I always have, and send him before the courts. But let it be known, I do not agree with your decision."

"Regardless of that, you have your orders, Master Kenobi. I should hope your *attachments* won't prevent you from carrying them out."

42. The Babies

Kamino:

Thousands of clones stood in uniform order, awaiting orders from Kamino leaders in Accordium Hall. The war was over. And while some assumed they would be free to live as they saw fit, the Jedi Council dropped proton bomb. The clones were to be sent to Kamino for termination.

Years of fighting side by side with the Jedi and this was the thanks they got. Slowly, the paperwork was being processed. And the clones faced their fate with the same braveness in which they fought.

The Kamino beings would take the stage and direct them to a facility there on the planet. Likely gas, some of the clones troopers thought. Today must have been the day of their mass termination. For thousands were called to the hall. A second group would then follow theirs, to receive their orders to terminate.

A lone darkly cloaked figure appeared on the holoscreen before them, his head down as he spoke, face hidden in the darkness of his hood.

"The Jedi and what remains of the Senate have issued an order to terminate the clone forces," the voice spoke. "But now is not the time... the Republic is in trouble."

A murmur of sorts swept through the hall. Some of the clones grabbed each other's hands as if to support each other, others watched the stage in apt attention.

"The clone forces were sworn to protect the Republic from tyranny and evil. Well... that day is upon us. And I ask you to join me in saving the Republic !" the cloaked continued. "It is your sworn oath. Your duty, your **PURPOSE**."

(An outbreak of applause)

"But sir," a voice called from the sea of clone troopers. "Our directives come from the Jedi."

Anakin pulled the cloak from his head, showing his face. An audible gasp rang out. "Then you are not in violation of your code. I am not only a Jedi, but **THE** Jedi. Anakin Skywalker... *the Chosen One*," he said.

Nearly all of the clone troopers knew and recognized the great Anakin Skywalker from places of battle and Holonet News. Of all the generals that commanded them, he was the only one who went out of his way to save them when they were in trouble, while the other Jedi didn't even see them as human.

All the clones stood in sharp salute to the great warrior. Not a single voice rose in protest.

“Together, we must save the Republic from its traitors. Section 87409 of Amendment 313 states the Jedi must serve the Republic and are barred from interfering in political affairs. And yet, they’ve driven our senators out of office by remand or outright execution in clear violation of the law. The Jedi are tyrannical. They’re dictators... and have turned against the government we serve,” Anakin said, pacing the stage before them. “In order to save it, we must drive this sickness and corruption from the heart of our beloved Republic... and out of Coruscant like poison from a wound and save what remains of the Senate and our security forces... we must save **you**.”

Obi Wan Kenobi and Mace Windu walked briskly down the hall of the Jedi temple for an emergency council meeting. The Republic was being rebuilt and there was peace in the galaxy... But despite all the good that came out of Chancellor Palpatine’s death and the end of the war, both men sensed that something was still out of place.

“I have a bad feeling,” Mace said.

“Think positive, Master Windu.”

“Positive thinking is as unrealistic as hopeful thinking. Remember, we must face the challenges ahead of us despite any uncertainty. Hope is hollow.”

“Indeed.”

The two Masters hurried into the Room of a Thousand Fountains, seeing only four masters there. Leading the discussion was Supreme Chancellor, Master Yoda.

“Disturbing report from Kamino, received I have. The clone forces have left.”

“In violation of our order to terminate?” Master Windu shook his head, eyes wide.

“But Master Yoda... the clones are programmed to take Orders from the Jedi and the Jedi alone. How could this be?” Obi Wan asked.

“It means, it was a Jedi that ordered them to leave. Master Fitso has investigated and not one of our field Jedi, it is,” Yoda said.

“I sense, we all know who’s behind this,” Mace replied, lips tight.

“Master Windu, I fear your personal feelings about Anakin have clouded your judgement.”

Obi Wan Kenobi’s assessment of the Master drew a gasp from the room. “I’m sorry, master. But it would take much to sway the Clones into disobeying an order, and Anakin is not a man of words — but action.”

Mace nodded, a silent agreement.

“Death, is motivator for many things,” Ki Adi Mundi interrupted. “And the clones may well have decided to preserve their lives despite the order to do otherwise.”

“Then let us decide. Obi Wan Kenobi will continue to lead the investigation into Anakin’s whereabouts. And I will go to Kamino,” Mace said. “Perhaps, there are clues there to set me on the right path.”

"Good plan this is," Yoda replied. "Master Kenobi, search your feelings you must. And find your former apprentice."

"I will do my best, Master Yoda. But somehow, I'm certain Anakin is not behind this."

Padme Amidala Skywalker had been struck by on and off labor pangs throughout the day.

"Give the baby time," D210 had told her through Threepio. "When the contractions are less than five minutes apart, we will begin the delivery of your baby," Threepio translated in an excited voice.

"Is Anakin here?" she replied, beads of sweat on her head.

"I think he arrived this morning. But it appears he is set to leave again."

Padme tried to sit up. "Leave? Where he is going?"

"Perhaps you might ask him yourself."

Threepio moved aside, allowing her a view of her husband, who had entered the room. Padme reached for him. He sat beside her, taking her hand in his.

"Anakin, the baby—"

"I know." Anakin caressed her cheek, smoothing aside an errant strand of hair. He wore his dark cloak and lightsaber.

"But... you're leaving..."

"Don't worry my love, I'll be back. There's something very important that I need to do. D210 and Threepio will take good care of you."

Padme shook her head. "More important than me and the baby? You can't leave, not now!" she insisted.

He leaned forward and kissed her on the forehead. "Everything will soon be set right. I promise. I'm doing this for you and the baby."

He stood and walked toward the door.

"Don't leave..." Padme whispered in a strained voice. Her words fell on deaf ears.

Anakin was gone. Gone with the men he now called Storm Troopers and were now on their way to the Jedi Temple to confront the council. They would turn them out of Coruscant and scatter them throughout the galaxy like vagabonds... just as they had done to him and Padme.

As Anakin's star destroyer rose to the sky, another descended.

Obi Wan Kenobi was inside. When he told the Council he didn't know anything about Anakin or where he had gone — he lied. Mygeeto was Anakin's adopted home. A place he went as a Padawan to get away from the Order. He had friends there. Friends who would help him if needed.

Traces of Clone troopers were there. Obi Wan could sense them. A feeling of dread washed over him, as Mace Windu's words called back. "I sense we all know who's behind this," he said.

Obi Wan first visited Gobi, an old gambler and past informant. The man lived above a playhouse, the kind men from other systems visited for the sole purpose of being entertained by women.

"Gobi, old friend," Obi Wan smiled.

"Yeah yeah yeah," Gobi replied. "A friend you are, never coming back to say hello? I suppose you want something from Gobi yes?"

"You see straight through me," Obi Wan replied. "And I'm sorry I haven't visited. But I am looking for my old apprentice, Anakin Skywalker."

"Don't know where he is," Gobi replied.

"You must know something. Please... he's in trouble and I need to help him."

"Ah, yes, the Jedi. Turn against him no?"

"So, you know something?"

Gobi's face turned bright red. "I'm not supposed to say anything. But he's here. If you help him, and not do anything to hurt my good friend, then I tell you. Otherwise, you must kill me first."

"I swear, I mean him no harm. Anakin is my friend, and I've come to warn him."

"He lives in the house over the ice bridge — East Mygeeto."

"Thank you, Gobi. If there's anything I can do..."

Gobi opened his hand. Obi Wan smiled, reached into a compartment on the inside of his tunic and gave the man a handful of credits.

"Nice seeing ya!" Gobi replied, a smile across his wrinkled face.

Obi Wan hurried out of the playhouse and climbed into the starfighter, his destination eastern Mygeeto. Which wasn't far from where they were...

He circled the ice bridge from above, then landed the ship just before the house. He braced himself, his stomach in knots as he approached.

Obi Wan knocked on the door. After a few moments of intense waiting, it opened. Threepio stood on the other side. "Oh, Master Kenobi! Please come in. Master Skywalker isn't available, but the senator is inside."

"I see..." Obi Wan replied, following the droid into the lavish interior. He wondered, almost immediately how Anakin could afford such a dwelling. This was far more elaborate than the Senator's apartment at 500 Republica. "Please tell the Senator that I would like a friendly word with her, if possible, and I apologize for arriving so unexpectantly."

"Oh, I'm afraid the senator is in no condition to visit. She is having her babies as we speak, and I must get back to her."

“Babies?”

“Yes,” Threepio replied, excitedly. “There are two. But, the senator doesn’t look too well... D210 is working desperately to make her better.”

Obi Wan sensed the situation was indeed, quite grave. He followed the protocol droid to her bedroom, where Padme had already given birth to a little boy. She was miserable, panting wildly and grunting in pain.

He gazed at the senator, steel blue eyes soft and compassionate. She reached for him and he took her hand into his own.

“Hang in there, Padme,” he said.

“Anakin,” she said, tossing her head miserably.

“He isn’t here. But I am. Stay with me, Padme. Threepio said you weren’t well. The babies need you. Be strong.”

D210 chirped then pulled another baby from the senator. After a few tense moments, Obi Wan heard a cry.

Padme gasped, exhausted.

D210 spoke again, leaving Threepio to interpret.

“She isn’t well,” Threepio said. “There were problems throughout the pregnancy, but none were discussed with Master Skywalker.”

Obi Wan Kenobi’s comlink buzzed. He hastily answered. “Yes?”

The garbled sound of Yoda’s voice passed through the line. “Master Yoda, I will be there soon. I haven’t engaged Anakin yet, but I will.”

Padme held Obi Wan’s hand, falling in and out of sleep. “Stay with me,” she mumbled.

“Don’t worry Padme, I won’t leave.”

He couldn’t abandon her while she was in such a terrible state with only two droids to look after her. Threepio found a chair and gave it to Obi Wan, who sat beside the bed, watching as D210 laid the two freshly cleaned babies beside her. The adorable twins cried and cooed. The girl, somewhat agitated, and the boy, easy going and calm.

Where the sun shined on Mygeeto, darkness fell on Coruscant and the Jedi Temple. Thousands of Storm Troopers descended on the ancient grounds from air and land, led by one someone who carried a lightsaber.

Bolts from blaster guns screeched. Air bombardments knocked the spire from atop the temple and fires burned.

Children and Knights alike stood their ground, until they realized how outnumbered they were, tried to flee, only to be cut down before they were able to escape.

Anakin Skywalker sought all the masters of the temple, but it seemed they had left the grounds unguarded. So sure they were of peace, probably because they were the only ones who threatened it. Nevertheless, there was always supposed to be at least one master at the house. But on this night, there were none. Only undistinguished Jedi.

It didn't matter. There were clones stationed throughout the galaxy, wherever there were Jedi — under orders to unleash violence unlike any they had ever seen.

He did it for himself. He did it for Padme and the baby— who the Jedi, planned to take away, he did it for peace. Every slash, every dismembered body, every decapitated head, every fallen youngling.

Dead.

They brought it on themselves.

43. Prevail

Obi Wan Kenobi gazed at Padme, eyes soft. D210 had somehow, worked a miracle, stabilizing the young woman. She now sat with both babies cradled in each of her arms.

"What will you name them?" Obi Wan asked.

"Luke. And Leia."

"They're beautiful names. I'm sure, Anakin will be very happy."

Her eyes fell, a sadness in them. "Is Anakin in trouble?"

"I'll talk to Anakin, it's nothing for you to worry about. That said, take care of the little ones. I will come back to visit you. I promise," he said, voice in a whisper.

"Will Anakin come back?" Obi Wan being there could only mean one thing. They were going to fight.

"I certainly hope so, my friend."

Obi Wan leaned and caressed the side of Luke's face. Then stood. Could he leave Padme to raise two infant children on her own? Leave them without a father? Kill his own best friend? That's what the Council wanted. And he resented it. But Anakin made things bad for himself. He probably meant well in trying to save the clones. But meaning well meant nothing to the Council, who were already biased and against him. Namely, its second in command, Mace Windu.

Just as Obi Wan turned to walk out of Padme's room, Threepio came bustling through the door.

"OH no!" he cried. "Senator Amidala, please, turn on the Holonet. There are disturbing reports of a rebellion at the Jedi Temple."

"Are you sure?" Padme gasped.

"Yes, and the report has come from the Senate. Apparently, the clone forces are there now, squashing the rebellion. It's gotten very very ugly, my lady."

Padme sat the babies on the bed beside her. Luke squirmed and Leia wailed. Their mother used a remote device to turn on Holonet news. She, Obi Wan Kenobi, and Threepio listened, all in shock at the recent turn of events.

"I'm sorry, I must leave now. Take care, Padme"

And with that Obi Wan was off, running from the house to his starship. If only, he had listened to Master Yoda who had gone to Kashyyyk to investigate the clone situation. He was asked to guard the temple last night, the only master available. If Anakin was behind this, he could have stopped him. Either by way of duel or simply by way of convincing him to change course.

The starship blasted through Mygeeto's atmosphere, and linked not far out of its system to the hypernet, which allowed him to move at light speed to Coruscant.

Padme clapped a hand over her face and sobbed. Is this the reason Anakin left her alone to have their babies? To get revenge on the Jedi? Would he do something so awful to the Republic they both served so loyally?

The babies squirmed, and soon, both were wailing. Padme gathered them close, if anything, they were all she had left of Anakin, if he had done the unthinkable and turned to the darkside, or worse, died in battle.

"Please, Anakin... come back to me," she muttered.

Plumes of smoke rose from the Jedi Temple. Onlookers gawked and pointed, while Clones try to steer them away from the carnage and debris. A starship circled above, watching everything... Yellow tape surrounded the premises below. Obi Wan landed the starship near the top of the temple, on a collapsed landing dock where the spire had fallen in.

Where are the children? he wondered... the younglings, the padawans? Could Anakin do something like this? Obi Wan shook his head. Not Anakin. Not the boy who spent more than half his life under his very tuteledge.

He walked, stealth like, slipping from hall to hall, chamber to chamber, sabering Clones before they could detect them, sometimes snapping their necks...

Obi Wan sensed that Anakin was somewhere in the building. Likely, waiting for him or some other master. Someone he would match in a duel to the death. One, that wouldn't result in his own. For he was powerful indeed. Powerful enough to kill TWO Sith Lords, already at so young an age.

Obi Wan moved stealth-like to the Room of a Thousand Fountains. Yes, the very place where the council rejected Anakin's plea for mastery.

He walked inside, lightsaber ignited, stepping over puddle of blood. A chill ran up his spine. Across the room, Anakin stood. Gazing out of a large picturesque window onto Coruscant's blazing skies. He didn't turn. He didn't have to.

"Anakin..." the name left his lip in a whisper... a plea, even.

"If you want a fight, I'm here to give you one."

"I've come to understand. Anakin... what have you done?"

"Exactly what I needed to do. Exactly what the Chosen One is supposed to do. Balance the Force."

"By killing your brothers and sisters?"

"They were traitors."

Anakin turned, eyes dark. He pointed the end of his blazing lightsaber at Obi Wan. "Stand down, or fight."

Obi Wan sighed, heart heavy with sorrow, for all the brave heroes lost in the bloodshed there in the temple. "Master Windu was right..."

"Master Windu spearheaded the Jedi's takeover of the Republic. He is worse than Dooku."

"I admit, I don't agree with their tactics of late, but Anakin... this was not the answer."

Anakin talked through gritted teeth, seething. "I know what you're thinking," he growled. "And you're right. Not even the children were spared. But it had to be done. They were already contaminated by the flawed Jedi doctrine. They would have risen against us later."

"US?"

Anakin circled him.

"I sense it master... you too, have lost faith. You saw the error of their ways. But won't admit it. You're horrid by this change. The bloodshed. Like the padawan learners and children, you too have been brainwashed to believe the old way is the ONLY way. It isn't. And nor will it be, again. But unlike the children, you are wise, Master. I know you see the truth."

They circled each other now.

"The only truth I see is that you've turned to the dark side."

"Where there is light, there is shadow. I understand what it means to balance the force. That one cannot exist without the other."

"And where there is darkness, what is there of light?"

"Nothing. Which is why the Jedi must be stopped. Master Windu has already proven, with Vaapad, that Light and darkness can co-exist. The intolerant Jedi must not continue any longer. You resent me for what I've done, my master, but was it not you, who taught me that nothing should stand in the way of one's mission? If the Council sent you on a mission and instructed you to slaughter everyone, including the children, would you do it, master?"

Obi wan was silent.

"Have i not followed you on missions where questionable tactics were employed under the direction of the council? In the name of completing a mission. What happened here in the Jedi temple, was just that. Doing what I needed to do, despite the horror it brings, master."

And now, he sounded like the Anakin, Obi Wan had always known.

"Please... I don't want to fight you. Join me. We can end this once and for all," Anakin pleaded. "We can restore balance and peace to the Republic. The Senate, has unanimously decided that I should rule, until a suitable successor is elected. My serving the Republic wouldn't contradict the law, as I have been expelled. The Council are the ones who violated Amendment 313, in partaking of politics. You can start the Order anew, my master. You were always the wisest, of all the Jedi. Yoda is too old. He won't let go of the old ways. The old ways are wrong."

Anakin lowered his light saber, blinking, body unsteady.

"I was never allowed to say this before, Master Obi Wan... but, I love you. You were good to me and trained me well. I can say I love you now, without fear of scorn or reprimand. The Jedi are against love. Life, passion... they're the ones who are on the dark side."

Obi Wan lowered his lightsaber and paced the room. Taking it all in...

The chosen one was born of the Force to introduce a new philosophy to the Order. One, the old guard like Dooku and even Qui Gonn Jin had tried to change it, but failed, the effects of which, allowed the Sith to disguise themselves becoming unrecognizable to the Jedi, who never evolved, and eventually led to the clone wars, and the near end of the Republic. Because Yoda and others like Mace Windu, were impervious to change. Unwilling to loosen their hold on power.

Obi Wan wept for the broken down temple. The fallen Jedi. The lost Padawans. And realised, he too, had attachments of his own. Did those attachments make him evil? Were those attachments out of love, and light, and not of darkness?

If he "joined" Anakin... could he not control him better? To ensure the peace and integrity of the Order as Yoda and the other Masters had failed to do in trying to keep the old way?

"Then it is agreed, Master," Anakin said, sensing Obi Wan's faltering belief in the old system. "All Jedi, including those in the field have been terminated. All but two."

Obi Wan nodded. His body shook. The change was too much for him. "All but Master Yoda, and Master Windu," he said.

"We'll move against them, master. I'll take Windu. You will take Master Yoda."

Obi Wan managed a smile. "Anakin... I doubt either one of us are powerful enough to destroy Master Yoda."

"I've beaten two Sith Lords already. Two powerful Sith Lords. Were you not the master who trained me? I sensed it master, good will prevail against the old."

Obi Wan thought about a mission he and his master went on, to save Qui Gonn's secret love, when he was thirteen years-old. A mission that led to his being expelled from the Order. There was a civil war between the old and young on an alien planet. Obi Wan identified with the Youth, and resisting a directive from his master, he stayed fought in a war to help the Young. AFTER challenging Qui Gonn to a duel.

"Fine. If I fall, then it is my fate. And likely, because I deserve it."

"You are good, Master. We will prevail."

44. Duel of the Masters

Hi guys, for an uncut “grownup” version of this story (not for readers under 18!) please feel free to visit [swsotrofans](#). Simply google “SWSOTROFANS” to find it. There are also other stories by other authors. It’s a mature Star Wars fanfiction website. -
Yours truly, CG

Obi Wan Kenobi flew his starship to Kashykk, his mind a blur. Where did his loyalties lie? With the Order, regardless of what they had done to the Senate? Regardless of how they betrayed the chosen one, who had done nothing but fulfilled the prophecy? Or was he loyal to Anakin? Because he raised him and was like a son to him?

He couldn’t be sure.

He wasn’t sure of anything these days. All he knew was that he was on his way to Kashykk to challenge Master Yoda. The Supreme Chancellor of the Jedi Order. Guide of light. Though, as of late it seemed he were anything but.

Mace Windu walked through the various control rooms of Mustafar, the hilt of his purple lightsaber wet with green and red blood. Bodies laid in sloppy piles, severed heads scattered about here and there. The second in command leader of the Jedi Council happened upon a Separatist hold out.

“Lord Sidious promised us peace—”

“Consider this an end to your peace treaty,” Mace replied. In one swift swipe of his blazing sword, the Viceroy was no more. Mace kicked his head across the room.

“An end to all those who oppose the Republic. Now we will finally have peace...” The Master whispered.

Suddenly... he felt a presence. A familiar one. He turned around. A star ship landed on the landing strip just beyond the area in which he waited.

More separatists, he thought.

Mace clipped the lightsaber to his utility belt and strolled outside, hands on his hips. The landing platform descended and a lone cloaked figure climbed down the ramp.

“Skywalker,” Mace said, teeth clench.

Anakin stood, legs akimbo. He shirked the cloak he wore from his back without even moving his arms.

“So... you’ve finally decided to turn yourself in.”

“You’re mistaken, Master Windu. It’s you who are a wanted man.”

“Wanted? You’re the one who colluded with a known Sith Lord. A man who orchestrated the war from its very beginning.”

“And as the chosen one, I destroyed that man. And yet, you destroyed my name. Ruined my career. But no worries. The Order and the Republic you and Master Yoda drove into the ground is no more.”

“What do you mean?”

They circled each other.

“My army and I have have toppled the corrupt order and its Jedi Council. I am the acting Emperor of the Republic.”

He turned his back to the Master, eyes gazing at the rivers of lava before him.

“Emperor?”

Mace Windu opened a hand and his purple lightsaber flew to his palm and ignited. He pointed the end of his blade at Anakin.

“Any Jedi not yet destroyed will be. But it is safe to say that the order is being rebuilt. The Sith were not the only corrupt ones. I am fulfilling my destiny as the chosen one. The order will begin anew. You will not be a part of it.”

“No... You are wrong, Skywalker.”

“Master Obi Wan seems to agree.”

Mace narrowed his eyes.

“Then I suppose the time has come to end your short reign.”

Anakin smiled, growling, “*You will try...*”

Anakin backflipped, lightsaber igniting as it flew to his palm. He attacked Mace Windu, swinging wildly, viscously, and kicking at all once. The Vaapad Master scrambled, stunned by Anakin’s display of raw power. He whirled his purple lightsaber, meeting the parries with equal ferocity.

But Anakin, younger, faster, and stronger drove the Master back into a darkened corridor where their lightsabers collided in explosions of light. Mace Windu soon realized, that he was in the fight of life. There were no games, there was no playing, he needed to think — fast. He kicked Anakin into a wall then force pulled him to the ground, knocking him over a table where separatist bodies laid in a bloody puddle.

Anakin’s hand rose and he clenched his fist. Mace dropped the lightsaber, rolled over the side of the table, clutching his throat choking and gasping for dear life. Anakin jumped, lightsaber in hand, bringing it down over the master’s neck. But Mace had already force pulled his purple lightsaber back to his palm and blocked Anakin’s strike before it removed his head.

Anakin used his mechanical arm to press the lightsaber down, forcing the Master to kill himself with his own lightsaber. Particles popped and sparked near Mace's face. He used the force to throw Anakin back.

But in two steps the young man was attacking again, driving him out of the control room. Anakin kicked. The heel of his boot smashed into Windu's mouth. He spat blood.

"The dark side will never win," Mace said, bloodied spittle creeping from the side of his mouth down his chin.

"I concur," Anakin replied. *Was it not the Vaapad that used the dark side!* Did Mace Windu see his own fate?

He shook his head. "Senator Amidala will take her seat on the Senate once more. She agrees with me and Master Yoda. You've gone too far, Skywalker. She will challenge you at every step."

The revelation made Anakin falter, but just a bit. Now angry, as he wasn't before, he raced toward the master and swung again. Mace rebuttled with a strike of his own.

"You lie—" Anakin yelled, teeth clenched.

Mace nodded. "You lied from the very beginning. You were the chosen one. *Our chosen destroyer.* You lied about your marriage, you kept secrets from the Council."

"I knew nothing about the Chancellor's plan. You tried to destroy me, and now, you will be destroyed."

What did he mean by, Padme was planning to take her seat on the senate again? To challenge his authority? Anakin swelled with anger. His rage drove him to end the fight, pushing and pushing the Jedi Master back until they were at the edge of Mustafar's lava shore. They stood atop a hill of black sand. So hot beneath their feet it felt as though their boots would melt.

"I've accepted my fate," Mace said, nodding... panting, "but I'm taking you with me."

"You can accept your fate, master. But I have a wife and a child. You will go. But you will go alone."

Mace Windu leapt, twirling his lightsaber maniacally in one desperate move to strike Anakin down. He knew the young knight had already defeated two Sith Lords, and it seemed he would defeat him. But still... he could try.

Anakin whirled, meeting the purple lightsaber and knocking it from Windu's hand. It slid to the bank below. He swung again as Master Windu came down. His blue lightsaber met Mace's legs, which came first, then melted away both of the Master's arms.

Mace slid down the black sand hill to the fiery shore. He grunted, the searing heat of the lava bank causing his anguished flesh to rise. "Anakin..." he moaned.

But the Jedi Knight watched, silently, rapturously, as Mace groaned and moaned in agony.

"You have violated Section 313 of the Constitution, Master Windu. And for that, the Order will begin anew. It will begin without you."

Mace growled, an ember catching his clothes and igniting them. Anakin turned away, unable to look any longer as the fire consumed him.

"This is the end for you, master. I'm sorry. I wish it were otherwise..." He spoke, his back facing Master Windu's incinerating body. It was only a few minutes, but his death seemed to take forever. The flames raged and roared, its shadows flickering like a great black monster.

Finally, Mace Windu groaned and wailed sorrowfully. Then the wailing was no more.

Anakin ran to the landing dock.

Obi Wan's ship landed in an area of the dense forest, where the intelligence division of 191st Storm Brigade had told him to go. It was Master Yoda's coordinates. He had met with the wookies, and seemed to be in hiding there having learned of the fall of the OLD JEDI ORDER.

Yoda watched as the starship landed, and the platform descended. He had already sensed his pupil. His favorite pupil Obi Wan Kenobi. A pupil who rose quickly through the ranks of the Jedi to become a favored Master. A pupil whose infant body he had once cradled in a pod many many years ago.

Yoda had also sensed the fall of his order. And the fall of his second favorite and closest pupil, Mace Windu. There was time still to save him, he thought. But now, he must deal with the unfavorable act ahead of him. Time to put an end to the pupil who was once a dear friend.

Yoda stood in clearing, leaning on his gimer stick. Obi Wan walked down the ramp, head low, hidden inside of his cloak.

"Master Yoda," he said, with a reverent bow of his head.

"Rise, padawan. Come you have, to destroy me. Have you not?"

"Those are my instructions."

"So it would seem. Student becomes master?"

"Aye, master. That is the case, when this is over."

Yoda's eyes fell to the ground below, his heart heavy with sorrow for the already slain.
"You are resolute. But defeat me, you cannot."

"For the good of the Order, I must. That is what you have taught me, Master."

"The boy I knew is no more. And call me master, you must not. Destroy you I will, as though you are cast unto me, a spawn of Force-hell."

"And it seems, you, have shown your anger. Which is not the Jedi way. The Council have become pious and prideful, vainglorious. Unwilling to compromise. It is a fact, that we have violated the Order and the laws of the Republic in overthrowing the senate. Our part in the war, our part in politics have no place in the Jedi religion. I am here Master, to begin it anew — where you have failed us."

"Talk no more, we will."

Yoda brandished his lightsaber. It floated to his palm.

"May the Force be with you," Obi Wan said.

"It is. Hope for you sake, the Force is with you, Padawan. But fear it is not, I do."

Yoda attacked, flopping and flipping from tree to tree — his lightsaber twirling and whirling manically. Obi Wan Kenobi blocked each blow. Suddenly, the little green Jedi had a revelation. Beneath Obi Wan Kenobi's undestated fashion was a warrior unlike any he had ever faced. It was not hate that fueled him. Strength or raw power. But a sense of moral right. A sense of being decent and good. These were reasons Obi Wan had been his favorite pupil. But also a reason why he had underestimated him. Until now.

The two masters fought for what seemed like an endless time. neither seeming to win just yet. Obi Wan waited patiently for the Supreme Master to near him before reaching out with his lightsaber to strike. It was his style. As Mace Windu once told him, he was not a master of Sorensu. But **THE** master of Sorensu. IT was at this moment, that Obi Wan realized, he was more than qualified to duel Master Yoda. But qualified to take his place as the benevolent leader of the New Order. He was not pious, or prideful as Master Yoda had become. He was not vain. Arrogance is why Master Yoda was losing now. Obi Wan Kenobi's patience was wearing Yoda's 900 year old body to a point of exhaustion. The sun had waned. Hours they had been fighting when Yoda came to a decision.

He raised an arm, drawing a one ton branch from the top of a nearby tree to Obi Wan's head. But Obi Wan flipped backward, out of its path. And forward again, to match the Master. He looked around.

Yoda was gone. As was his starship.

45. Finale!

Anakin walked through mustafar alone. Thinking about home. Thinking about the time he had been away from Padme and their child. Seven weeks old now. A child he had never seen. He counted bodies in the various control rooms. The Viceroy was dead. Anakin gave a silent thanks to the fallen Jedi Master lying dead at the bank of the Mustafar river. He thanked Mace from saving him the trouble of doing it himself.

With all threat against his Empire out of the way, Anakin decided to head home. To meet his child. To make love to his wife. More than enough time had passed, he thought with a smile.

Anakin turned, sensing a presence there on the Lava planet. A ship landed near his own. He knew that ship. His heart flipped. Home had come to him. Anakin attached his blue lightsaber to the utility belt wore. He had used it to stab holes in any bodies that appeared to be breathing, still.

He hurried out of the control room, not wanting to frighten Padme with so many dead bodies. He ran toward the ship as the landing platform descended — heart caught in his throat. Then pushed it down with his mechanical hand, too anxious to let it fall on his own.

Anakin ran up the stairs. And Padme greeted him, meeting him halfway down. He wrapped his arms around her. He hugged her tightly.

“What are you doing here?” he asked. “Where’s the baby?”

Padme looked as though her world had come to an end. And suddenly, his heart clenched with worry. He shook her. “The baby!?”

“Inside,” she said, lip trembling.

Anakin ran aboard, racing to deck. Padme followed. He approached, finding a crib with two babies inside. Two identical babies. A girl and a boy. He turned and looked at Padme, his eyes swelling with love.

“Twins?” he asked.

Padme nodded. He had never bothered to come see them. So consumed with the Republic and taking over. So consumed with power and greed. Her heart thundered in her chest, pounding with fear.

Anakin walked slowly to where the babies lay sleeping. Splattered blood soaked his cloak. He could not hold them. Not until he had taken a shower. He didn’t want separatist infected blood to touch his babies. They were like angels. Their faces were of peace. It was the second happiest moment of his life.

“What are their names?”

Padme looked down, unable to meet his eyes. “Luke and Leia.”

She fought the sorrow that oppressed her aching heart. Anakin walked toward her, cupping her chin. "What's wrong?" he said. "You're not happy?"

He gave her a questioning look then pulled her close. Padme shirked from his grasp then turned and walked from the deck, leaving the ship with hope of not waking the babies. Threepio was with them. Threepio was her friend, her everything. Everything that Anakin should have been. He would look after the babies while they talked.

Anakin followed her out, face contorted with sudden anger.

He grabbed her arm, twirling her about to face him. "What's wrong? Tell me what's wrong!"

"I— we've hardly seen you. You haven't come home, you haven't comlinked. I was so worried, Anakin..." she cried... "Master Windu told me horrible things."

"You've seen Master Windu?"

Anakin remembered what the fallen master had told him about Padme.

She looked down, eyes weepy with tears. "He told me, you and the clone troops stormed the Jedi Temple. That you killed your masters, your friends, even the younglings."

Anakin clenched his teeth. He held her by the arms, head bent toward her. "Master Windu is trying to turn you against me."

"So... *what he told me about the children was a lie?*"

Anakin caressed her cheek. "The Senate have named me Emperor."

Padme looked down, shrinking out of his grasp. "So I've heard."

Anakin sighed. "From Master Windu right?" Apparently, the master had visited Mygeeto. Had even been in his house with his wife and children.

"Master Windu said—"

"Don't you dare speak his name to me, as though he means something. He means nothing to us. I don't want to hear ANYTHING else about Master Windu."

Padme backed away, seeing the anger in his eyes.

"Anakin... I'm leaving, I can't be with you anymore."

"So what Master Windu told me is true? That you'll seek a place in the senate to challenge me? Don't ever challenge me, Padme. Don't ever think about leaving, either."

Padme gazed at him, eyes worried. "I'm sorry, but I have to go... And I've found a new place to live. For me and the babies," she answered, voice resolute. "Please... just-stay away from us. I don't know you anymore." She backed away from him.

"You'll keep me from my children?

"You kept yourself away!" she yelled.

Anakin shook his head and stalked toward her. "You'll keep me from my children?" *You'll keep me away from you?*

You murder children! she wanted to scream, but was not brave enough to say.

"You stand there and look at me like that? When everything I've done, I've done for you? Don't you see Padme. I don't care about the Order. Only you and the babies. I'm the emperor now. The children will be future emperor and you will rule by my side."

Padme shook her head, a stream of tears falling from her eyes. Anakin pulled her into an embrace and held her by force. She tried to shake him, but to no avail. He searched her eyes.

"Anakin... you're breaking my heart," she cried, gasping. "You've taken a path that I can't follow, please... come back to me," she pleaded. Padme pleaded to the man she fell in love with. The man who sired her children. The man who loved her more than anything in the world. More than greed or power.

"You talk like I'm gone. Like you want me dead."

Padme resigned, her hands sliding away from his face. Anakin was, truly, indeed, gone. Anakin would never say such horrible things. Anakin would never do such horrible things.

"I'm sorry. But I don't know you anymore," she said in a deadened voice. "I don't love you—"

Anakin's face burned, turning a deep red color. His eyes flared and he clenched his teeth together. "You—" he growled. "*Don't love me?*"

Padme struggled against him, wanting to break free. But he held tight. Anakin burned like a torch. And indeed, the blaze had him blinded with rage. He thought about the innocent blood shed. **FOR HER.** He thought about winning his freedom from Watto only to promise his body and soul, the *very freedom he had won*, **TO HER.** He thought about losing his place in the Order. **FOR HER.** He thought about all he had fought and conquered, **FOR HER.**

...and here she was, telling him she didn't love him anymore.

"I told you..." Anakin growled. "You'll never leave me."

He bent his head and kissed her, prying her lips apart with his own. *Remember me? Remember our love?*

Padme dug her nails into his flesh.

Anakin grabbed her arms, forcing himself onto her, gathering her to him as he had always done when she was willing. But Padme struck out, breaking free. She slapped his face. As hard as she had slapped Dorme. Anakin exhaled then stumbled back, stunned.

Padme shook her head again, tears flowing. "*I DON'T LOVE YOU ANYMORE! I don't want you!*"

She turned and tried to run aboard ship, but Anakin lunged toward her in anger, his mechanical hand seizing her neck. Padme gasped and tried to pry his fingers apart. But they squeezed tighter, drawing her to the ground in a backward free fall. He leaned over her, bending her to the ground like a snapped twig.

Padme finally collapsed. Anakin hovered above her, gently touching her neck. "I told you—" he started. Then suddenly, he saw Schmii in her face. And *cringed*. Anakin collapsed.

Falling to the ground beside her. He pulled Padme into his arms and hugged her close. Though, her head merely dropped back, her body wilting like a flower.

“Don’t leave me, Padme...”

He stood with the fallen senator in his arms and carried her aboard the waiting ship. Where Leia hollared and screamed. Where Luke played peacefully with his overhead mobile. He caressed strands of their mother’s hair from her face, whispering a silent prayer... again and again... “Don’t leave me, Padme...”

Somewhere on Kashyyyk, a Jedi Master prepared for a new beginning. And somewhere else, perhaps nearby, a stolen starship landed, near a lava bank to resuscitate a fallen Jedi Master. Who breathed, if only to live for revenge.

The End.

46. Sequel

The sequel to “The First Time” is now posted under the title **“The Blue Shell”**.

Thanks for reading this story and all the best!

Yours Truly,

CG